LOVE LYRICS OF LONG AGO

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DEPARTMENT OF TAMIL DEVELOPMENT - CULTURE
GOVERNMENT OF TAMIL NADU
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Transcomposition into English verse of selected love poems from Tamil Sangam Literature

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INTRODUCTORY

Love has been the staple of poets everywhere, in all epochs. The other emotions can come in as ancillary but love has to be the principal sentiment of poetry. The Tamils gave the pride of place to love, as other literary communities did; but went a little farther than the others in their enthusiasm for it when they recorded their considered opinion that creative imagination is needed only for the composition of love poetry. This quite remarkable and indeed unique and perhaps controversial statement is to be found in aphorism 56 in Akathinai iyal of Poruladhikaram, the chapter on Aesthetics in Tolkappiar's grammar, the hoariest work of its genre in Tamil, having the authority of a dictator's caveat in this part of the world. Poems on other topics may involve a logical reasoning faculty, a fresh viewpoint, perhaps, a comprehension of human psychology and the ways of the world but they do not need creative imagination for their composition. Even the Sanskritist who allotted a dominant role to love in his literature did not go so far. But the dilettante of literature, unswayed by prejudice will perhaps admit that the Tamil possessed the clearest and the deepest comprehension of this fundamental feature of Aesthetics.

The translator who has no difficulty in accepting the truth of this statement felt it would be the most effective argument in its favour if some of the love lyrics from the Sangam Age are selected and presented to the lover of poetry as transcompositions in English verse. He is strongly persuaded that this sampling would convince all genuine lovers of poetry about the primacy of the love theme in creative literature. Apart from this, he also believes these pieces presented in this volume would dispel the feeling in some quarters that love poetry should be necessarily sensual. Quite a section of the world's love poetry and a high percentage of modern fiction would indeed appear to hover dangerously near (if they do not actually cross over) the line that demarcates decent writing from plain pornography. Readers of these present pieces would be sure to notice how they primarily represent the impact of the divine passion on the minds of

the principal actors, eschewing sensuous physical descriptions of the anatomy of the girl. Indeed there is a poem (Kuruntokai 204) where it is specifically stated that love is all about remembering and recollecting past occasions when the lovers were together rather than actual physical contact happening in the present. It would be difficult to find anywhere in the world a love literature of greater probity than the Tamil Sangam.

Poetry anywhere is conditioned and shaped by literary tradition: in a few notable instances it is even inspired by it. Poetry of another age and a very distant age like the Sangam has to be savoured in the background of the many traditions and conventions by which it is bound and a knowledge of which is presumed in the reader. Hence it is proposed to give a brief idea of the more important conventions and regulations which inspire and guide the Sangam love lyrics.

The conventions by which Sangam love poetry is bound are based on a very distinct philosophy of love between man and woman. The ancient Tamils thought that love is divinely inspired: a boy and a girl get united in sacred wedlock only through the machinations of a specialist deity. The physical act of love was regarded as much the lesser part of the process of love-making: indeed the Tamil concept of love was metaphysical. This love is first born in the boy and the girl in a meeting which the Tamils believed is arranged for by the patron goddess of Love. This incipient love develops in a series of clandestine meetings helped on by the (girl) friend of the girl, a most interesting and enterprising character. This secret love is set in the background of mountain slopes and verdant forests and the preferred part of the day is midnight - all doubtless chosen to safeguard the precious secret from the parents.

Indeed there is an organic relationship in Sangam love literature between the various stages of love and moods of lovers and the landscape, the flora and the fauna, even the season and the part of the day when things happen. Everywhere in the world poets make dexterous use of nature in evoking sentiments but the ancient Tamils were probably unique in laying down an elaborately structured convention where the stages of love and types of landscape have an organic, integrated relationship, based firmly on natural association.

These poetic conventions have taken such a powerful hold on the Tamil mind that even after they had been forsaken as a structure (perhaps after the 3rd cent. A.D.), the individual symbols have continued to appear in the later poetry. Ilango uses them quite intensively and Kamban calls them to his aid when describing Rama's forlorn condition after the abduction of Sita. These evocative symbols have been harnessed to greater or lesser purpose by the poets who appeared after Kamban, too, like Villi and those who put together the minor prabandas. Their remarkable durability over two millennia of changing ways of life and literary values must be put down to the fact that they have great basic poetic value.

The convention relating landscape to the moods of love is so much rooted in the Tamil mind that if monkeys and bears and bamboos and jackfruit are referred to in a poem, the sentiment of clandestine pre-marital love is surely evoked in the reader's mind: this renders redundant a detailed description of the mountain background; this certainly makes for brevity and saves reader's time but, more significantly, makes it possible for the poet to secure the infinite literary benefits of suggestion.

As an illustration, the reader is referred to poem (Kuruntokai) 394 in the collection. The piece starts with the mention of a lofty hill and the village of the mountain tribe followed by a description of an elephant calf. These three references to montane regions help to evoke an atmoshpere of premarital love in the reader trained in the traditions. The reader then is mentally and emotionalyy ready to receive an experience centred on pre-marital love. In most poems on this theme the reader would find that flora and fauna that typically symbolise mountain slopes are mentioned fairly early in the piece; the point, of course, is that, thus placed early on, the symbols could evoke the right frame of mind in time for the reception of the experience dealt out in it. This is true, not only of the kurinji mode but of all the other modes, too; as instances, the reader is referred to Kuruntokai 334 (neidal), Kuruntokai 221 (mullai), Kalitokai - Palai 5 (palai) and Narrinai 260 (marutham) where such evocation is done through symbols quite early on.

The next stage is set in the grassy meadows where through the long day there is an air of expectation of the cattlemen leading their cows home to the waiting wives and calves. Naturally the meadows

have become the setting for poems that treat of girls waiting for their lovers to return to them. The characteristic flora and fauna of this type of landscape which the poets use to evoke this sentiment are the mullai flower, the deer, the rabbit, the cattle and the favourite games of dairy-farmers like bull-baiting.

The normal or average piece on the mullai mode (if, in truth, we can envisage an average among creative works of art) treats either of the sorrow-filled waiting by the girl for her husband or lover to return or of the young man excitedly telling his charioteer or himself about the mental state of the girl. But we have a very refreshingly different set of poems included in the mullai section of the Kalitokai where bull-fighting contests are described with verve and tempo. Bull-fighting is the prime pastime of pastoral people everwhere; but to the Tamil cowherd, it has a very special significance. For each nubile girl is associated with a fierce, fighting bull and to marry the former, a young man has to grapple with the latter and subjugate it. "None but the brave deserves the fair"; and in these poems we frequently come across the boastful statement by cowherdesses that they will not so much as look at a man who fears the pointed horns of a killer bull. A long transcomposition containing all the material of significance culled from seven pieces in Kalitokai has been included in these selections. Apart from the distinct nature of the contents, one notices another peculiarity about these pieces; they are presented partly as the poet's version and only some parts as the version of characters, usually cowherd girls. This is unique among Sangam love lyrics as the rest of them all have been presented in the version of one character or the other.

The sea-shore villages form the setting for a more accentuated sentiment of love-in-separation. This fits in naturally with the landscape where women wait anxiously all through the endless day for their fishermen-husbands to return home from their fishing expedition. The Tamils were a seafaring nation and when the husband leaves on a commercial expedition for Java or Cambodia, the parting is of much longer duration and the reunion, with all the perils of voyaging, sweeter. But usually we find in these poems the lover travelling to the tryst in his chariot and the meeting held in an atmoshpere of fear over the possibility of the early return of the girl's kinsmen from their fishing expedition. The neidal flower, the fish, the crab and the killer shark are among the chosen symbols evoking this sentiment.

The sea-shore setting has also been used by the Sangam poets to record some pre-marital situations, much like the kurinji or the mountain slope pieces. Indeed many of the best poems with a seashore background are of this type, describing the early experiences of the lovers in their attempts to meet in secrecy. These are helped by the fact that the fishermen are away to the fishing grounds and much clandestine cover is offered by the dense-growing thalai bushes and punnai trees. The girls of this region are out in the daytime mounting watch, against thieving gulls, over the fish spread out to dry on the sands, much in the same way hillfolk girls keep off pirate flocks of parrots from the ripening millet; they offer an excellent opportunity for the young man to meet his girl clandestinely, in the shore of the sea as much as on the slopes of hills.

The sharpest and the most accentuated form of the sentiment of love-in-separation is set in the background of desert tracts. Men have to venture out of their homes to distant places to earn money with which to run their home; and their journey takes them through the burning desert where all life withers away and pitiless brigands lie in wait to plunder and kill the hapless wayfarer. The setting is appropriate for the sentiment of love that takes on a sharp edge of desperation. Not surprisingly some of the finest poems in all Sangam literature have the desert as their setting. "Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought". The symbols chosen to evoke the sentiment are the trees and bushes that are classified as desert vegetation; the palai is the chief floral symbol: and the ever-hungry jackal and the cruel kite are the symbolic fauna.

The background of the barren desert tracts has been harnessed to describe a quite different situation, too. When the young lovers are unable to get the assent of the girl's parents (it is invariably the girl's parents; the boy's parents are nowhere in the picture) they elope and the path of their flight lies invariably through desert wastes. Hence the palai or desert background is utilised to describe elopements. The better poems of this class are presented in the version of the disconsolate mother or foster-mother who laments over all the privations. that a desert journey certainly entails. Such poems present a glowing picture of a loving home where everyone doted on the girl and which she has left behind in cruel disdain in the company of a callow youth. The picture of the excessive affection subsisting between the girl and the others at home serves an important purpose; as the girl has

elected to leave her home with its wonderfully comforting atmosphere of love and consideration, preferring to go with her lover, such scens serve to indicate the measure of the love she bears towards her young man.

Some sharp critics like Somasundara Bharatiar have raised what would seem a very valid objection against using the palai background to paint scenes of elopement. If palai represents separation, the real separation with which a love lyric should concern itself is that between the lovers. When the lovers are together and the only separation involved is that between parents and children (which, however sad, is of little account in poems on love), the desert background is most improper as it can evoke the wrong sentiment in the reader. Elopements have traditionally been presented in the palai background as lovers running away had to cross inhospitable terrains, in those days; and this background lends a sharp edge to the lamentations of the mother. There is much in the arguments of the critics that deserves deep consideration; but the Sangam poets have had their say and who can dispute the masters' word?

The married couple settle down in a town in a riverine basin and for a time all is bliss. But man is not destined to be continually happy: the husband gets ensnared by the coquetry of public women and begins to neglect his wife and home. Usually in such cases he comes back home on hearing of the birth of a son. Many are the poems treating of the foot-loose husband and the sorrowing wife, set in the background of well-watered plains where food is available in plenty and life is easy and man's mind naturally turns to vice. The evocative symbols for this fifth kind of landscape are the water-buffalo, the rice plant, the lotus and above all else, the marutham flower.

If poetry is the vehicle of transference of experience, the conventions of the ancient Tamils help actively in improving the effectiveness of the vehicle.The individual pieces in the group called Akam which comprises all love poems are short, some of them quite tiny, of five or six lines in length. Each is a separate and distinct piece and has nothing to do with the preceding or the succeeding one. These Sangam love lyrics can best be compared to exquisite carvings on small pieces of ivory, each complete and artistically perfect in itself. Now, in such short pieces it would not be easy to evoke the necessary emotional associations to enable the reader to undergo the desired

experience on transfer from the poet's mind. The expertly conceived symbols, as we have seen, however, help quickly to create in the reader's mind the necessary sympathetic and receptive emotional frame of mind which would constitute the first step in the process of transference of experience.

One of the essential things the poet has to accomplish in this process of transference is the universalisation of the experience. Tamil convention lays down firmly that no names or other identifying details of the characters which tend to particularise the experience can be mentioned in love lyrics. The ban is so total and is considered of such fundamental importance that some wonderfully poetic love lyrics are classified under Puram (as distinct from Akam which comprises love lyrics) only an account of the mention in them on the names of the characters. This convention is given all this importance only because this, more than anything else, ensures universalisation of the experience by shedding what are particular, unique and local.

Another vital convention that helps this process of transfer of experience relates to the manner in which the poems are presented: every love lyric is given out in the version of one of the characters and none is set forth in the version of the poet, with the exception mentioned earlier. Even among the characters, the meticulous convention permits only some, the privilege of speaking and bans the version of the others. All this clearly is intended to secure authenticity of involvement in the emotional part of the experience. In the transcompositions presented here, all love lyrics are introduced by a statement, like 'The boy speaks' or 'The girl speaks' or 'The friend of the girl speaks'. This too is a rule that is universally observed in the field of Akam or love-lyrics; no exceptions being allowed; we cannot cite a single stanza of this group that is wholly set in the version of the poet himself. The few exceptions are the mullai poems in Kalitokai where some part of the piece is presented in the version of the poet.

In presenting these love poems, it was felt desirable to arrange them in the order of the chronology of the events they talk about. The advantage the reader will derive from such a chronological arrangement is that the drama of love from its early sprout to its maturity not excluding the storms and cyclones and spells of drought it goes through and survives and comes out of triumphantly is presented before him. This would provide him with a vivid sense of reality and

perhaps a chronological continuity which these short Sangam lyrics are not designed to provide. Seeing that a continuous chronological account of these stages of love is made available to the reader in the Kovai poems of a later day, and that the Tirukkural, a later Sangam work, in its section on love presents the pieces in the chronological order, the translator felt that such a presentation may well serve to make the selections more interesting and meaningful, especially to those who have recently started to nibble at the delicious fruit of Sangam poetry. He, however, has to sound a note of warning that such a chronological presentation should not lead the reader to identify the same boy and girl in all these pieces, the presentation should be savoured only from the viewpoint of the temporal succession of the events, not of the identity of the characters.

To enable the reader to appreciate the relative significance of these stages of love without losing the wood for the trees, the translator has divided the work into six books each of which is devoted to a distinct major stage of the developing love drama. Such a division and, indeed the order of the pieces within each book may not fully conform to the dictates of the old grammarians; but such conformity as is consistent with the needs of a modern reader, perhaps of another clime has been secured. To enable him to have a clearer idea of the land covered, every book is introduced by a brief passage in prose suggesting what to expect in the pieces comprising it.

Incipience

The ancient Tamil society believed that marriages are arranged for in heaven. The deity in charge of love and marriage deftly manages, somehow, to bring the nominated boy and girl together and love blossoms. Some times the meeting takes place when no one else is present but often the faithful and resourceful friend of the girl is present. It was believed that until her proper young man came up, the girl would be protected by her quality of bashfulness like an Armour worn. In practice this quality often overdid its assigned job by guarding the girl with the same solicitous zeal and preventing her from moving freely even with the proper young man at the incipient stage.

The result is utter despondency on the part of the young man who thinks (like all young men all over the world at this stage of love) that she does not love him, that he is not worthy of her. The doubts and diffidence wear off slowly and at the end of the first stage both the partners in the romantic adventure feel fairly confident requital. At the end of Book I we leave the lovers in ecstatic contemplation of their good fortune where particularly the male partner raves about the matchless qualities of his finance. All this has an undercoating of panicky fear of discovery by the parents, by the mother who will prevent all further meetings and by the father and brothers who, by temperament, would be inclined to express their disapproval through a shower of well-aimed arrows.

The friend to the girl

Dearest who are clad in a garment woven
With leaves and blooms! When we were guarding
The mature millet in our fields in the hillslope
He came up to us as if enquiring
About an animal that he was chasing.
Clearly he had something else
Than that, in his mind when he came to us.

He Wasn't after a beast he was chasing,
I am sure of it, it was something else!

(Aintinai Aimbadu 114)

The friend of the girl to the boy

Chieftain, on this mountain slope
Where the vengai blossoms, spreading far
The sweetest perfume, where we the girls
With shoulders soft and plump like bamboos
Girls of the tribe of hunters live,
There has been no elephant sighted
With oozing blood, we haven't seen
An elephant here as you describe.

(Tinaimoli Aimbadu 7)

The friend to the girl

What can be the reason for our present state?
You may recall how with our friends
We were at play on the soft fine sands
Heaped as a mound on which had fallen
In comely patterns, the fragrant pollen
From the blossom clusters black with bees
On the punnai tree that has grown to a height
The tree that's beset with drops of brine
From the constant waves on the sea hard by,
When we were at play, a certain youth,
Leaving his chariot and retinue

Walked up alone, wearing garlands
On his chest and around his head
And praised the houses of mud we had built;
And getting no response from any of us
He left, with his retinue, since that day
Our shoulders plump got debilitated,
Our bangles started slipping down,
Our anguish burgeoned all the time
And we couldn't get a moment's sleep
All the bitter long night through;
The harbour too along with us
Has known no rest, no respite at all
All through the night, How account for this?

(Akananooru 250)

The girl to the friend

No one but me suffers so!
Do you recollect the hunter youth
The chief who rule over yonder hill
Where all through the day one can hear
Music that is uncontrived
But beatufully orchestrated -
Strains of music as from a flute
By the wind blowing through bamboo holes,
The constant hum of the bees, the lyre
With the waterfalls, keeping time?
The chief of this enchanting country

Walked in one day, bow in hand
Indent on picking an elephant's trail
Right where we stood, the bevy of girls
Told off to guard the millet crop
From the depradations of pirate birds.
They all saw him, the girls guarding
But non of them is any the worse
For having seen him, the chief of the hills
They scarce remember seeing him!
But I, but luckless, luckless I
Saw him, dear and the scene has cost me
Dearly indeed, for, from that day
I toss in my bed, sleepless, through,
My pillow wet with the stream of tears
That flows unchecked, while the whole world sleeps,
None but I in all the village
Suffers so - I am singled out
Marked by a ruthless fate to grieve
Without respite.

(Akananooru 82)

The young man to himself

Who may this be, whose darling daughter?
Who is she, with the damp cool eyes
Shot through with thin veins of red
Expressive of a deep longing?
Who may this be, now attired

In a dress of leaves and of flowers,
Dark of colour, so vibrant, youthful?
Who is this that can make e'en me
Grieve with a longing that has no end?
May her father thrive and prosper!
May her mother exult with the glory
That surrounds King Porayan's city
Tondi of the flawless fame,
Where, among the paddy sheaves
Harvested by the farmer's men
Blooms a neidal dark as the eyes
Of comely maidens!

(Narrinai 8)

The boy to himself

If the friend of the girl starts swimming in the river
By catching hold of the top of the float,
The girl, too, abjectly follows suit.
If the friend takes up the bottom of the float
She too moves to seize that end.
If the friend decides to let go the float
And swim with the current, she might follow her!
What friendship and what dependence
This girl I love has towards her friend -
This girl I love that's tender as a shoot

With eyes that are shot with delicate veins
Red like the pithi that blooms with the rains!

(Kurunthokai 222)

The friend to the girl

Think of him, dear, ponder over
His looks of distress, his loss of lustre
When he walks slowly to our village
And talks but little (that little is sweet)
Everyday; he clearly wants
Something from you, even like
The girls that read the omens, standing
With sticks that are bound with silvern ends,
In a posture of suppliance behind Akudai
Who dispenses gifts of toddy,
Like the girls that stand keen, expectant
Of gifts of female elephants
He looks to me a suppliant
For some thing distinct, my dear, from you!

(Kuruntokai 298)

The boy to his friend

The wise at all times testify
In accord, solely, with the evidence
Of their senses : let no one stray
Into that hamlet of fisherfolk!
My royal heart has been ensnared

With little hope of its retrieval
There in that village, without a thought
Of the difference in the social scale!
For, in that village on the shore of the sea
Where shoals of fish are gathered by
The fishermen's nets with the finest mesh,
Men that stray are apt to be
Ensnared by the pair of eyes
Of the comeliest daughter of the fisherfolk!

(Kuruntokai 184)

The boy to the friend of the girl

The well-loved, handsome daugter of hillmen
With bees swarming her done-up coiffure
And wearing a dress of cool young leaves
Is decked with bangles. Her youthful teeth
Have started developing. She's sure enough, young
But already grown up to torment men.

(Ainkurunooru 256)

The friend apparently addressing the girl but intending her words to be heard by the parents says

He is the chief of productive hills
Where the hunter, digging for edible roots
Finds precious gems that are big, resplendent.
He came, he saw her and stroking her hair
He said, "You shall, when you arrive

At the age of discernment, well-decked girl,
Leave your house and move to mine!"
Where is he now, I wonder, dear,
Where is the youthful chief of the hills?

(Kuruntokai 379)

(These suggestive words convey to the parents the fact of the love bond between their daughter and the highly eligible youth who met her some time ago. The purpose is to discourage their attempts to marry her off to a different boy).

This comely, comely girl
When I gazed at her
Returned my avid gaze,
This was even like
A goblin that had been
Tormenting me this while
Now coming at me with
An army armed to the teeth.

(T.K. 1082)

Two kinds of sequel has
The glance of this handsome girl.
It can cause disease
In the object of the glance.

But the look can also cure,
Can act as therapy!

(T.K. 1091)

When I look at her
She lowers her comely eyes'
When I direct my glance
Elsewhere, she looks at me
And looking, softly smiles.

(T.K.1094)

If the pairs of lovers' eyes
Each does meet the other,
There isn't much that remains yet
To be, by words, accomplished.

(T.K. 1100)

The cure for all diseases
Lies elsewhere than their source.
For the illness caused by her
The cure is she herself.

(T.K. 1102)

Moon, you may claim you resemble her face
I grant it may. But if you desire
To be like her, you should avoid
Appearing in public and being visible
To all and sundry in the wide, wide world!

(T.K. 1119)

None but I can gaze on her eyes.
But my mind, deluded stands
Transfixed at seeing flowers in bloom
Mistaking them to be her eyes -
Flowers in bloom that have been seen,
Intently gazed at by scores of men!

(T.K. 1112)

Lady that reside all the time
In the dusky pupil of my eye!
Move out, make room for the girl
I love and want; for, if you stay on
There may, for her, be no room there!

(T.K. 1123)

The submissive manner and words of the thief
Versed in all deceitful ways
Constitute the force that breaks
My bastion of chastity.

(T.K. 1258)

Where from did she derive this -
This unique fire which burns up one
That moves away and cools one up
If one draws near to it?

(T.K. 1104)

The boy to the girl

You keep silent; there's no response
To my words of love, from you!
Overcome by a gusting wave
Of rosy bashfulness
You lower your face, you hide your eyes
By covering with your hands!
When love begins to overflow
Who can dam the flood?
And it's not only your killer eyes
That overwhelm me so,
Your eyes shot with crimson veins
Red like the tip of the tusk
Of the pachyderm with the stink of the flesh
Of the tiger it gored to death
Playfully with its spear-like point -
Your piercing eyes that kill.
It's not only your eyes that haunt me
The eyes which you hide with your hands;
Your shoulders too which resemble
Koodal, the capital town
Of the Pandiya monarch, the matchless fighter,
Who reduced his foemen's forts
Defended by their valorous warriors
From their safe ramparts,
And seized their wardrum as the trophy of war -
Your shoulders too are fearsome;

They aren't covered. I'm exposed to them
How do I guard myself?

(Narrinai 39)

The young men to his friend

In the days before I met the girl
I claim I did have a number of traits -
A balanced mind, a friendly nature
A capacity to blush at traits
That work against the norms of the world,
A keenness to maintain propriety
A discernment and a cultured mien.
I did possess them; I knew their value
Even better than you do, my friend!

What comely lines, what handsome dots -
Dots as if the paste of sandal
Has been splashed on her raised breasts!
On her forehead she wears a mark.
Her hair giving off the smell of honey
Is dressed to fall into five lovely plaits.
Her eyes looke like the kuvalai flowers
Picked from a pool of limpid water
And wreathed together; before I saw her
I was quite normal, I had those traits!

(Narrinai 160)

A friend of the boy to him

Lightly they discourse on the subject of love
Without a grasp of the essence of love!
It's surely not an ogre, nor is it an illness!
Even as the cow now past its prime
With infirm teeth and powerless jaws
Noticing succulent grass on highlands
Puts out its eager, aged tongue
Only to feel the blade of grass,
Which it is unable to crop and eat!
Love is rememb'ring, recollecting the joys
Reliving the moments of total bliss
That was yours some time and is no longer, now.

(Kuruntokai 204)

A friend of the boy to him

Lightly they discourse on the subject of love
Without a grasp of its deepest nature!
It's surely not an ogre nor is it an ailment
It does not suffer waxing and waning
Nor does it ebb nor flow at times,
Even like the must of a pachyderm
Which spurts forth, fed by its food of leaves,
Love bursts forth to its fullest stature
The moment the chosen girl and the boy

As ordained by the god of love
Come together.

(Kuruntokai 136)

The young man to himself

You fell in love with this, the handsome girl
Of beauty uncontrived, with coiffured hair,
And got repulsed; and now your sense of shame
All washed away like bags of salt kept stacked
In carts lined up on a lofty bank, in rains,
You seek her favour though repulsed, O mind,
Like drunkards full of mindless glee with draughts
Who long for more; you cannot give her up!

(Kuruntokai 165)

The young man to himself

You are like a man
Who, without means
Aspires to the pleasures
Which money alone can buy!
O mind of mine, you are
Most aware of her
Matchless qualities
But you seem ignorant
Of the fundamental fact
That she's truly hard to get!

(Kuruntokai 120)

The boy to his friend

You think it is easy for me to secure
The hand of the hillfolk girl for my own.
How wrong you are! When on their hunt,
The brothers of the girl spot a deer,
They draw red blood by pelting stones
And segregate it from the rest of the herd,
Give it hot chase without respite
Its mate, distracted, keeping close
To her lord in the hour of its direst peril;
And when they come within striking distance
They speed an arrow; it strikes the deer
In its genitals; her brothers pluck
The lethal arrow smeared with blood!
How can I hope ever to touch
The shoulders of the girl whose eyes
Resemble the arrow smeared with blood?

(Kuruntokai 272)

The young man to himself

The waves aren't rising, the restless sea
Is now silent! The cool, damp wind
Has scattered the flowers in the bowers
With their powd'ry pollen, leaving the beach
Empty, robbed of its customary grace.
The owl with its mate flies to the top

Of the akathi tree that stands in the square
At the end of the street in the ancient town -
The street that's filled with the sand from the beach -
The owls hoot loudly sending tremors
Of panicky fear in the hears of the listeners -
The ghouls are abroad in the gloom of the neight -
The gloom that is deep, impenetrable.
But I keep awake when even the fish
The restless fish are deep in slumber,
Filled with the deepest longing to fold
The breasts of the girl in tight embrace -
The youthful breasts, round and plump
With supple shoulders like full-grown bamboos
The girl who looks like the Kolli statue -
Full of grace - I so much long
To be with her tonight - It's this
Burgeoning passion that keeps me awake!

(Narrinai 319)

The boy to his (male) friend

The comely maiden decked with jewels
Has stolen my heart. On that account
I do not sleep by day or by night
Restless like the noisy waves
Of the ocean next to the city of Thondi
Where swarms of bees hover o'er the bowers.

(Ainkurunooru 172)

The boy to himself

Before I met the girl of the fisherfolk
Before her eyes, in thraldom, held me tight
How sweet to me was the silver-sandy beach
And the shadow dense of the punnai tree from where
The village girls all mounted careful guard
Over the fish that look like the tender root
Of turmeric spread on the sands to dry,
How good the beach, how friendly seemed the village
How nice and sweet these looked to me, how pleasant
In those happy, happy days before I met her -
The girl with a narrow hip and lovely eyes -
How sweet, surpassing sweet was everything!

(Narrinai 101)

The friend of the girl to herself, in the hearing of the lover who wishes to present a garment of leaves to the girl

A mountain cow
With the colour of rust
Equipped with short horns
While grazing on the slope
Happened to brush
Against a kanthal bloom
And got powdered
With the pollen from it.
When the cow returned,
Its own calf

Confused at
The change in her colour
Wasn't quite sure
It was its mother.
Such events happen
In his mountain land
And now he wants
To present her
With a garment of leaves.
If we accept the gift
And my friend wears it
I very much fear
Mother would be roused
To a terrible rage.
If I return the gift
He would be aggrieved
And that would pain us,
Caught in this conflict
If we delay our decision,
The leaves in the garment
Picked from a spot
That is inaccessible
To the mountain goat
So skilled at climbing -
A spot in the mountains
Presided over
By fearsome gods,
The leaves of which

The garment is made
May fade away!

(Narrinai 359)

The young man to his friend

The girl is a daughter of highland hunters
That occupy the village
Surrounded by a protective wood
On the verdant slope of a hill.
A woman well trained in acrobatics
Walks the tight rope, dancing
To the beat of drums and the music played
On varied instruments
And a female monkey with a ruddy face
With its infant hanging on,
Observing her tight-rope dance
Starts walking the rope itself,
Imitating the acrobat
To the joy of the village boys,
Who, climbing a rock, for a better view
Keep time by clapping hands.
My heart, my friend, has got involved
With the girl of the huntsmen tribe
The lovely girl with hair smelling sweet -
My heart has got entangled

And no one can free it, release from bondage
None, indeed, but her!

(Narrinai 95)

We feel how deep, how extensive
Our ignorance likes when we begin to learn.
So is the case with this girl I love.
The more I know her, the more intense
My enjoyment of this well-decked girls
The greater and deeper looms her mystique!
I now realise there is more to her
Than at the time of our earliest meetings!

(T.K. 1110)

The boy to himself

A stork on the shore of the eastern sea
With wings weakened with age advancing,
Driven by a longing to feast upon
The tasty ayirai that swims the waves
Of the western sea where Porayan rules
From the famous Tondi, his capital town,
Now raises its head with a fruitless desire,
For a meal of the fish beyond its grasp.
O my mind! even like the stork
You have gone and fixed your sights
On the distant girl that's beyond your grasp!
You're bound to grieve, you're bound to suffer

The painful harvest of evil deeds
Of lives gone by, with no reprieve!

(Kuruntokai 128)

The young man to the friend of the girl

Her breasts have come up; locks of hair
Are seen hanging loose on her back.
Her milk teeth have fallen and firm new ones
Have grown together, gleaming white.
Handsome spots have started showing
On her youthful skin. She torments me
From the moment I set eyes on her.
She doesn't know it - the comely daughter
Of prosperous parents. I cannot say
What passes through her mind, for certain;
What does she think, how does she feel?
Of what nature is this comely maiden?

(Kuruntokai 337)

(When the young man tells the friend of the girl how much he is taken up with the girl, the friend protests saying she is too young for love. This is the young man's bemused reaction)

The boy to himself

Like a garland wreathed
By the hands of an expert
Using the kodal
And the newly-opened

Mullai blossom,
Inter-wreathed
With the sweetest-scented
Blue-bell blooms,
Her body gives off
The sweetest bouquet!
This, her body
Is more tender
And velvet-like
Than a fresh young sprout;
And, believe me,
It's surpassing sweet
For a tight embrace!

(Kuruntokai 62)

The young man to himself

She is cool to the touch in the torrid summer
Even like the sandal obtained from
The slopes of the Podiyil where gods reside -
The slopes of which living things
Have little knowledge; she again can be
Pleasantly warm in the winter's cold
Even like the insides of a lotus flower

At the setting of the sun whose warmth has been
Stored in its heart by the flower in bloom.

(Kuruntokai 376)

(He successfully fights down his urge to leave his girl for distant lands to earn wealth, by reminding himself of her unique attractions).

The girl to her friend

The chief of montane slopes
Where silvern cascades leap
Like the path of wondrous light
Made by the moon on the sea
Is much like the sun, dear
And my shoulders, plump
Are the nerunji bloom to his sun.

(Kuruntokai 315)

(The nerunji flower follows the movement of the sun)

The boy addressing a bee

O bee, blessed with shiny wings
Who spend your life finely judging
The bouquet of flowers! Tell me now,
Not just what takes your fancy but
The absolute truth. Is there a flower
As sweet-scented as the hair of this girl -
The girl with a peahen's velvet softness
And dazzling teeth set close together

Whose love for me will never know
Any surcease through long aeons?

(Kuruntokai 2)

The friend of the girl to the young man

Chieftain of verdant hills
Where an elephant feeds on bamboos
Along with the grains on them
And seeking a shady copse
Of dense-growing plantains
Where young deer frisk and frolic,
It lies down for restful sleep!
Your domain is well-wanted, fertile!
The girl you love is one
Born to a childless family,
Of hillfolk that subsist on the fruit
That drops on the boulders stained
By the juice of jackfruit falling.
You brandish a terrible bow
With spots as found on the band
Of a cobra! This girl with bangles
Is smitten so much with love
She has quite forgotten her duties
Of chasing away the parrots;
You should not make her wait
For long; she suffers anguish.
You know no surcease from giving

Chariots and tuskers to poets;
You have compassion, chieftain;
I know you cannot inflict
Pain upon others! Like those
Who bring up the young one of a deer
In houses shaded by trees,
You should cherish her with love.
And take heed, like the deer
That runs away if neglected,
The beauty of my friend
Shall fade away, O chieftain
If you, condemn her to neglect
To anguished loneliness!

(Kalitokai - Kurinji 14)

The friend of the girl

You grieve, my dear, over his staying away.
He is the lord of hilly domains
Where the kanthal abounds. The eager bee
Too impatient to wait for the petals
To open at the moment of their own choosing
Just pries them open to plunder the pollen
Before the rest of the world learns of the flower.
The bees in his land can accomplish this;
Will he not do as much for you?
Indeed, dear, when I ran into him
In the street one day, I drew for him

A picture of the torment you are going through
And he displayed the deepest sense
Of shame: indeed he was much inclined
To blame himself for all your heart-ache.
He clearly holds you dearer far
Than anyone else in all the world.
My dear, be solaced! For before long
He shall wed you and put a stop
To all this suspense, to all this anguish,
Before the world of watchful eyes
Can uncover this, your secret courtship,
Before tireless tongues begin to fan up
Painful slander.

(Kuruntokai 265)

The young man to the girl

Does my mother know yours,
Are they acquainted, each with the other?
Are our fathers, in any way, kin?
Did you and I know each, the other
Before we met by fate's decree?
We came together, like the drops of rain
On the loose red earth of the mountain side
Making a whole, merging together
In indissoluble harmony;
Our souls have fused at fate's bidding
And we shall not, dearest, be parted, ever!

(Kuruntokai 40)

Book 2

Day and Night Trysts

The next stage depicts the rapid development of the understanding between the lovers through almost daily - or nightly meetings under the shroud of the utmost secrecy. The meetings of trysts are arranged for by the resourceful friend of the girl who by dint of her loyalty and intelligence and powers of organisation has earned for herself a central position among the characters of the Sangam love drama. The trysting place may be a meadow near the village or the millet fields if it is harvest-time and the girls have been told off to guard the millet from thieving parrots; if day-trysts become too risky, the friend fixes night-trysts for which the rendezvous is the vengai tree growing in the girl's own compound.

The union is exceedingly delightful but the fear of discovery is ever-present; and the realisation that the boy is running terrific risks of being eaten up by tigers or trampled by elephants during his long walk through the woods to the trysting place sends tremors of panic through the girl's heart.

Soon she realises that these secret meetings should stop and the young man should ask for her hand in marriage and wed her in the presence of all the kinsmen. But the youth who is reputed for his bravery in the field of battle is strangely hesitant, even timid, in approaching the girl's father with a marriage proposal. Now the intrepid friend takes over and in many poems she is presented talking to the girl under the pretence that she has not noticed the boy walking up to the cover of the bushes. She criticises his timidity, describes the agonies the girl is undergoing and through all the means at her command manages to convey to the hapless lover the need for urgency for him to take effective step to arrange for an open wedding. The many variants of the theme presented here point up the virile sagacity of the friend in putting across this idea of an early wedding to the willing but timorous young man.

The friend of the girl to the young man

Noble chieftain, you,ve left your fleetest chariot with your serfs
And all alone, you stand here, you of blemishless conduct!

You possess, too, such a comely form that everyone who
sees you
Is impelled to worship! But yet you come, urged on by
your longing
You've been coming for days on end talking in a humble
vein;
And this girl with her collyrium-painted eyes that look like
the kuvalai
Filled with tears who has lost her heart on your account is
anguished!
She has been petted by a doting mother, she all along has
been
Surrounded by her loving kin who value high her traits.
It's natural, chieftain, in the atmosphere of vaulting love
around her
She has developed a certain reserve, a bit of bashfulness.
Hence, O lord of seashore lands with sanddunes high as
hills,
I beseech you to go back now without an insistence
On your having, here and now, a union with the girl of your
heart!
For yonder is the palm-tree standing over the punnai in
bloom
And from there, chieftain, our nice hamlet is well within
calling distance
A hamlet fenced in by the sea with waves that break with
thundrous noise
Which strikes fear in the brooding hen that came in with
the carts of salt.

(Akananooru 310)

The friend to the boy

The pool adjoins the village; the brook,

Isn't far, too, from the village pool.
Right on the bank of the river stands
A leafy bower where no one goes
But for the cranes that fish in the brook.
We visit the brook to gather the earth
With which we rinse our flowing tresses:
This guileless girl too comes along
To the bank of the brook, in our company.

(Kuruntokai 113)

The girl to a parrot

Handsome parrot, handsome parrot
Green of body, red of beak
Who feed on the millet from the cobs now bent!
Feed on, fearless! On getting replete
I beseech you with folded hands
If you visit your kin in the hills
Where jackfruit ripens in clusters on the slopes
Please tell the chief that the hillfolk girl
Is once again guarding the millet crop!

(Narrinai 102)

The friend to the girl

When the chief came driving
His chariot to the tryst
The chief of sea-shore lands
With the many bells tinkling sweet,

You did not yield yourself
To the ardent lover courting,
But held in check by shyness
You withdrew into a shell.
Discouraged, he departed;
His ardour should be ebbing!
I feel distressed, dear;
This love that should burgeon
Now languishes, may die!

(Kuruntokai 212)

The friend of the girl to the young man

In accord with the terms of the tryst
I have brought your girl here
Leaving my doll on the sandy shore.
Chief of seashore hamlets, now
Sport with her but note this well,
She should go home before it's late!
Me, I cannot tarry longer
For I am worried that the crane replete
With aral fish may trod on my doll
And crush her face!

(Kuruntokai 114)

The friend of the girl to the young man leaving at the end of the daytime tryst

Chieftain of villages where life is soft,

Where fishermen wreathe the opulent bluebells
Flowering in the waters of the broad, deep creeks
Along with the nalal to deck their hair,
Fisherman of small hamlets where
There is a permanent stench of fish,
Consider her shoulders, how thin they get!
She spends her time looking at
The busy harbour next to the bower
Where the foam of the waves broken into bits
By the lashing of the sharks settles on
The curved branches of the punnai tree
She looks forlorn, she cannot sleep
she has lost her former beauty
That looked like the splendour of Kalumalam town
Ruled by Kuttuvan of the chariot and horses,
Renowned as a giver without restraint,
But you, O chieftain, you insist on
Leaving for yhour native town.
At the onset of night, when unable to be
With its mate, the female anril
Small and dark that lives in the nest
Built of thorns in the tree where reside
The gods of our village laments loud,
Diconsolate, you are keen to leave,
And the languishes here in pain and anguish.

(Akananooru 270)

The boy, clearly in despair, to himself

If one is able to see
Tha it is morning now,
Now noon and eveining
When parted people grieve
And now it's night time when
The world is all asleep,
Then one is not in love!
And one can ride a horse
Made of dried-up leaves
And incur ridicule
From the people in the street;
That's a shameful thing!
But to continue to live
Is itself shameful for
The one that's saddened by
Painful separation!

(Kuruntokai 32)

(It is possible that this young man, deeply in love could not keep the rendezvous owing to his inability to distinguish between morning, evening and night and is now desperate at his incapacity to win back his angry lady-love's esteem)

The friend of the girl to the young man

O Chief of hill slopes, where the tusker followed by eager bees
(Its trunk is plump like the trunk of palm, rounded, heavy, curved)

Its killer instincts fully roused mows down the trees in rage -

The trees that grow in the scented slopes - and takes on the fierce tiger

Slaying the beast that cries out in pain, with the points of the tusks upraised

And having destroyed the might of the tiger, it charges into the fields

Of the small-grained millet and gobbles up the ears of the standing crop!.

Aay Eyinan, the king that rode the fleetest horse was felled

In the field of battle by Minili the warrior riding a mighty chariot,

All feathered friends instantly flew to the field to be with Aay,

All but the owl which felt shameful and from the day on wards

The owl shuns the day and keeps to its nest till the sun goes down in the west.

This girl you love, in like manner, shuns the daylight, chieftain,

Ashamed at the scandal that has spread in the village! Do not come in the day-time!

Come to the tryst at the time of gloaming when pachyderms forage

For bamboo shoots in the copses on the slopes! Come walking the mountain path

Strewn with boulders where elephants amble! come to the nightly tryst!

(Akananooru 148)

(The friend seems merely to change the trysting time from the day to the evening, in this poem. But by pointing to the dangers of the path in the last three lines, she is really urging the young man to hasten the arrangements for the wedding)

The girl to her friend

His domain is the mountain slope
Where the faggots lighted by the hillmen-farmers
In their lofty perches, sending off
Scented smoke twinkle like stars.
When I, my dearest, think of him
Of his manly chest with sandal paste
I feel tormented; but when I can
Embrace him tightly, the torment vanishes!
How explain these opposed sequels?
I do not know; can you tell me, dear?

(Kuruntokai 150)

The friend of the girl to the boy

Mountain chieftain! rain clouds pile up
To deepen the gloom, it rains in torrents
And all the earth is overflowing
With gushing streams of rain water,
In the foggy night when all the world
Is deep in sleep (only we are awake)!
How did you come, o mountain chieftain!
How did you find your way to this
The trysting place where we await you
Where the air is thick with the heady scent

Of the vengai blossom? How did you come
In this night of nights, o mountain chieftain?

(Kuruntokai 355)

The girl to the friend

It was dark. The ceaseless rain had made
The night still darker. The ghosts that roam the slopes,
In panic had their eyelids fluttering.
Mother held the son that wears the teeth
Of a tiger on his neck in tight embrace
And kept calling me as mother all the time.
The mountain chieftain with sandal unguent
Smelling sweet on his manly chest had come
And stood outside like a tusker in the rain.
What did he plan to do, what indeed
He thought would happen, the night before, my dear

(Kuruntokai 161)

(The young man had come to the tryst the previous night and gone away disappointed as the girl did not turn up. He had come again today and was remaining concealed and the girl narrates to her friend the circumstances which held her up so that he may understand and forgive her).

The friend of the girl to her

If we tell him firmly
That we panic every time
He walks the jungle path
To keep his tryst with you,

(For at dead of night
The male bear, out to hunt
Locating an anthill,
Inserts its long snout through
A hole that it makes
And blows with such force
It sounds like the blacksmith
Working fast the bellows;
The noisy blow-out frightens
The snake residing there
But brings out all the termites
Which the bear eats up),
If we tell him the way
We panick every night
He is sure to wed
And take you to his village
Where the hillfolk decked
With garlands round their head
Of the blooms of the vengai tree
Planning to thresh the millet
Awaken the tusker
Asleep on the rock
That looks like the threshing floor
Where farmers in the plain
Thresh their paddy crop
By walking buffaloes.

Do not feel despondent,
Do not grieve, my dear!

(Narrinai 125)

The boy to himself, in the hearing of the friend of the girl

One does notice the doleful sequel of days of anxious wait
In the pallor of her skin; her eyes are cool and damp like a raining cloud;
Her shoulders plump, her tresses shiny, dressed by skilful hands
Into thick, long plaits that give off a scent even like the woods
Of Ori, the bowman (the woods wherein the playful deer feed
On the luscious fruit that's curved at the end, that falls from jungle trees).
She gets anxious, she is apt to start at the slightest sound,
To herself muttering, "Can it be the one for whom I wait?"
Now I wish that I can find somebody who can go
And apprise her of my arrival and put her mind at peace
How I long for such a friend, a messenger in need
Who can fill the anguished girl with delight at my coming!

(Narrinai 6)

The friend of the girl to her, with the lover listening in, concealed

The female monkey in his hilly domain
Huge in size with thorn-like teeth
Conceals it helpless, immature young
In the cloud that had settled on the lofty summit,

Making the male which is not very bright
Anguished with fearful anticipation.
You have been loving, you must, my dear
Now change your methods when dealing with him.
I offer you this simple counsel;
Until you are sure - may you live long! -
That the chieftain has developed a noble mien
And started living in the strictest accord
With the values learnt from the lives of the good,
You should dam up with all your grit
The vaulting love that springs in your heart!

(Narrinai 233)

(This is a counsel urging the adoption of a severe, loveless attitude in the girl towards the lover who is reluctant to ask for her hand, only so that he may be pushed to display some grit and get her parents' consent for their wedding)

The girl to her friend with the lover listening in, concealed

The disease I have som torments me!
My body is hotter than a raging fire!
Can you, my dearest, approach my mother
(Who is harder-hearted than hell's denizens)
To get her consent to my sitting awhile
On the raised platform on the open porch,
Assuring her that I shall get over
This illness of mine. You know I shall
If the cool breeze from the chieftain's hill
(The chieftain who has loosened my crafted bangles)

Blowing over the cool, broad boulders
Gently caresses my burning breasts!

(Narrinai 236)

The girl to her friend with the lover listening in, concealed

The bond betwixst the chief and me
Is unique, different from all other bonds -
The bond that was born in the little mud houses
Built on the shore by girls at play
Wearing wreaths of scented flowers -
Girls with shoulders plump like bamboos.
It is such, my dear, that if the chieftain fails
To come to the tryst for a single night
The anguish that engulfs me, in truth,
Looks as if it is the sum of griefs
Befallen over a stretch of time!

(Kuruntokai 326)

The friend of the girl, to her, with the lover listening in, cocealed

Listen, dearest, we may be in trouble!
In the court yards of their houses where girls at play
Well-dressed, youthful, have installed the ikon
Of the goddess made of dampened earth,
Nalal flowerets, honeyed blooms
Scatter on the floor like yellow powder -

In the lovely hamlet with kandal fencing,
Where such things happen, a scandal is spreading
Touching a chariot that came in the night.
There are girls of your age and many of them
But mother looked sharply, meaningfully
Only at you! As a consequence,
If tomorrow, we are stopped from going
To gather the gem-like blossoms blue
Of the mulli and other plants, and play in the bowers
Our beauty of skin will suffer, in truth
But if his chariot drives to the bowers
On the bank of the creek with the gem-blue water
And returns home with an empty heart
That, my dear, will be a far worse sequel!

(Narrinai 191)

The friend of the girl to her, with the lover listening in, concealed

I feel strongly that it would be better
If he does not come tonight to the tryst!
For even now, in the middle of the night
The small drum of the farmers harvesting
The millet ears in the fields on our hill
Is beaten to keep the watchmen awake.
It would be safer if he does not come!

(Kuruntokai 375)

(Night trysts are forbidden this way and trysts in the daytime in the millet fields are no longer possible as the millet, under harvesting does not need guarding any more. This is a clear message to the lover listening in concealed, to hurry up the wedding).

The Friend to the girl with the boy listening in, concealed

I feel, dear, the joyful meetings you have been having
With the lord of the hills (where the plantain leaves in the wind
Moving, stroke the broad expanse of elephants fast asleep)
The joint sports and swimming sessions in the pool where everywhere
Bluebells bloom are things of the past: you may not get the chance
Again to meet him in secret tryst in the shade of the mountain copse;
For the millet crop our brothers sowed in the pebbly mountain fields
Has ripened now, a sitting target for thieving hordes of parrots
And mother knows; but tends to look meaningly at you,
At your ample bosom now grown beyond the dimensions she knew
And the glossy tresses verdant, long, that crown your handsome head.
Frequent are the glances mother casts at you these days.
And well she may, this mother of ours, without a shred of pity,
Of ethical scruple ban our going to guard the millet field;
The grain has ripened and birds forage and guards are needed there
But she may not send us, you and me to drive the handsome thieves;

Your love shall languish, for I feel, your meetings cannot happen

And you may not sport with your mountain chief in secret daytime tryst!

(Akananooru 302)

The friend of the girl to her, with the lover listening in, concealed

With the dark clouds over the chieftain's hill
Sending out flashes of lightning and claps
Of resounding thunder, the stream from his hill
Is sure to be full with liviting freshes,
Carrying a lot of froth and flowers.
How joyful will it prove to be
If we bathe in the freshes in the company of our friends!
But we are now confined to the house by mother.
How nice it will be someone can go
And tell mother with all due courtesy
That if young people are prevented from
Bathing in the freshes which they love above all
It will be a measure that goes against ethics,
It will come in the way of their all-round growth.
If someone can be found to tell mother
And if mother can be made to give her consent
How great it will be for you and me!

(Narrinai 68)

The girl to the friend who spoke critically of the boy's dilatory tactics, with him listening in, concealed

How do I measure my love for him?
It's greater, wider than this earth,
It's loftier than the firmament,
It's deeper far than the billowy sea -
This love I bear for the mountain chief
In whose slopes bees make honey
From the pollen of the bloom of the kurinji tree
On its dusky branches!

(Kuruntokai 3)

(The kurinji blooms only once in twelve years. "Just as these bees patiently wait for that long so that they can get the honey they most desire, I too can wait long for the lord of my heart", says the girl)

The friend of the girl to the young man

Chieftain of hamlets on the shore of the sea
Where the sand thrown up by the crashing waves
Get disseminated by the constant wind
Into films of dust that look like clothes
Of silk that flutter in the breeze!
You have devoured her virginity
Flower-like, delicate, deriving bliss
Unware of our awful torments!
We are even like a blameless mother
Who has given up her child to be used

As the victim in a human sacrifice!
We have forsaken the bashfulness
That has kept us company
All this long! Now perhaps, chieftain
The lashing tongues of the village may
Start a slander on the goings-on!

(Narrinai 15)

The friend of the girl to the boy

Chief of lofty mountain ranges!
You do not count the mental pain
You cause in the girl you love so well!
You walk the nightly jungle path
Redolent with scenes of fright,
Where hunch-backed bears on their absurd feet
Forage about in search of food
And coming upon a thriving ant-hill
They thrust an impetuous, eager paw
Breaking up the walls of mud
To gather the termites white as rice,
Where the valiant tiger moved by the sight
Of its mate in pain from its recent littering,
And in growing hunger stalks the elephant
With reckless courage and fells it too
With a mighty blow that echoes through
The deepest caverns in the mountain slopes.
You travel through this trail of horrors

To be with her : it's true she needs
This fleeting meeting as much as you.
But lovers of a noble mien,
However deep be their mutual longing
Abjure such deeds as may bring
Calumny upon their heads.
Hence why such trysts? Why secrecy?
Why not seek her hand in wedding,
A public wedding with all our kinsmen
In full attendance, in the manner sanctioned
By ancient usage? How eagerly
I look forward to that joyful event
Where I shall watch as an honoured guest
The bashful stance of this comely girl
As befits a bride that is forced to sit
Next to you, a total stranger -
(A total stranger in the eyes of the kinsmen)
A tender scene that is sure to send
Waves of thrill through all my being!

(Akananooru 112)

The friend of the girl to the young man

Less of your oaths, O Chieftain of the vaulting highland domain!

For, listen, last night, when you turned up, having walked the path

Replete with dangers, embraced her and left on your way back home,

Mother noticed bees hovering round your girl's shoulders

Perfumed by you; she demanded the reason for the happening
The girl of your heart could find no words with which to solace mother
And all helpless, she looked at me in anxious expectation
I cast around in desperation; I noticed
A sandal faggot placed by mother just than in the fire
"The bees came in, perched in the faggot and when they felt
The mounting heat, they took wing and landed on your daughter"!
These words of mine, for the moment, did allay her deep suspicion.
But how long can she suffer torments, how long, mountain chieftain?

(Narrinai 55)

The friend of the girl to the boy

In the slopes of your hill, in the dense forests
The fierce boar with narrow eyes
In frenzied fury takes on the tiger
The killer tiger in mortal battle
Everywhere in your native hill
Scenes of such courage without a thought
Of certain death abound in the woods
Listen, chieftain, the girl you love
Is in anguish, for her parents.
Plan to give her away in marriage
To someone else and all the while
You lack the courage to ask her father

For her hand in holy wedlock.
Take heart from the dauntless beasts of your hill,
Muster courage and ask for her hand
Thus ending her gruelling heart-ache, chieftain
And saying her from certain death!

(Ainkurunooru 266)

The friend of the girl to the lover

The slit-eyed jungle boar
With hair like iron needles
Which hillmen use as arrows,
Impelled by its greed
To forage in the fields
Is about to walk, unknowing
Right into the hunders' trap
When, alerted by the sound
Made by a near-by lizard
It backs out with infinite care
To seek refuge in the cave
Amidst the boulders. Chieftain,
Such things happen in your land!
It torments her that you
Traverse the guarded path
To our father's protected place,
Choosing with care the moment
When the watchful guards relax;
What a risk you run

When you walk the jungle path!
But her ruthless heart, O Chief
And her eyes that cannot
Close in sleep at all.

(Narrinai 98)

The friend of the girl to the young man

Chieftain of the hills where on a branch
Of a punnai tree with a dusky trunk
That has flowered with the action of the bees
There hangs a hive from the walls of which
Rich honey oozes getting collected
In a depression in a rock below
From out of which, the hillfolk boys
Scrape a helping, leaving the rest
To be licked by the young of the softheaded monkey!
You walk the mountain path at night
With only a javelin for protection
Through the gloom cast by settling clouds,
Where crawling serpents strike terror.
You come to our hamlet with your chest
Anointed with sandal paste.
Do you harbour no kindly feelings
Towards this girl! Does it go with your culture?

(Narrinai 168)

The young man to himself

How resourceful, how cunning she can be
This girl I love - an actress consummate!
When, of nights, she comes bedecked with flowers
That spread a bouquet through all the Mulloor woods
Of the matchless warrior Malayan with the spear,
She seems mine own. But comes the dawn and then
She takes off the floral wreaths and dresses
Her locks with oil and a midst her kinsmen keeps
The straightest face with never a hint of all
That has been going on between us all this while!

(Kuruntokai 312)

Book 3

Away on the Wings of Love

The lovers have been trysting for quite sometime now. In some cases, perhaps, the young man declares himself totally incapable of going up to the father of the girl to ask for her hand in marriage. It is possible that the father conceives a low opinion of the suitor when approached, as happens in many cases upto this day. The urge of love is too strong to be resisted and the lovers decide on secret elopement.

The initiative for this bold step naturally comes from the friend of the girl who plans all the details and overcomes all the obstacles. The young people elope one night and travel through desert walks to the boy's place. The physical problems faced by the delicately nurtured girl in the arid desert are cheerfully borne by her in her mood of ecstasy occasioned by the fulfilment of her dearest wish.

The next morning the natal and the foster-mother wake up to find the daughter's bed empty and the birds flown. The natal mother gets into a querulous mood blaming the girl for this act. But the foster-mother, whose love for the girl is far greater in Sangam literature laments not only over her deprivation but over the cruel conditions her daughter has to face in the desert. There are many pieces, especially in Akananooru where she contrasts the luxury and the atmosphere of doting love that existed in her home for the daughter with the pitiless conditions in the desert. The poetic value of these is obvious; if the girl has knowingly preferred going away with her young man to remaining at home enjoying all this doting love, then, clearly, her love for the young man is much greater than her affection for her parent and friendship for her playmates; her decision to leave all this to go with her young man represents a measure of her love for him.

The friend of the girl to her

You yourself agreed to go
With him. And only on that basis
I fixed a time and told the chief

He came as fixed; but irresolute,
You stood, saying "Let today pass!",
Incapable of any active step
And shaking like a tender shoot
Fallen on to a fire. It seems
There's nothing left for me to do!

(Kuruntokai 383)

(With the querulousness of a general whose troops have failed to act up to his command, the friend of the girl sharply rebukes her for having developed cold feet at the moment of elopment)

The girl addressing her quality of bashfulness

Bashfulness, you're worthy of pity!
You struggled with me so long and hard;
But now, as the narrow sandy stretch
Green with a crop of rising sugarcane
Ravaged by the waves of the river, caves in
You held out, beset by love
For some time but impacted
By fresh onslaughts, without respite
You weakened. and now are swept away!

(Kuruntokai 149)

Wayfarers who saw the pair of lovers eloping in mid-desert, to each other

It seems't was but yesterday
That whenever these two, chaperoned
By their doting foster-mothers

Met in the street, he would grab
The locks of her five-fold plaited hair
And she would drag him by the hair ·
The coarse brown hair of his forehead
Nor could the harassed foster-mothers
Separate the battling young wild cats!
O kindly deity that take care
Of cases of love, how you have
Wreathed like a garland two loving hearts!
Blessed are your machinations,
O dispenser of the tender passion!

(Kuruntokai 229)

The young man to the girl with whom he is eloping

The rising rain clouds roar in thunder
Panicking the serpents to their holes
And pour out rains sustaining life.
Let us hurry, dearest, for the sun in setting!
Let your tresses bedecked with garlands
Fill out nicely in the breeze
Moving gracefully like a peacock's plumage -
The plumage that looks like a lovely blue gem!
In the woods of bamboo, the bells that the cowherds
Have tied to the cattle ring out sweet
Handsome maiden, yonder appears

My own lovely little town!
Let us now hurry, the light is failing!

(Narrinai 264)

The mother to herselt

Her hair has started curling; her breasts
With their soft nipples now look like bowls.
She has developed the qualities
Of a woman, surely. I have been aware
Of this whenever I looked at her.
Even yesterday I felt I should
Take effective steps. My heart was promoting
But led by my folly I failed to act
I failed to confine the girl to the house
The house has a system of guards resembling
The famous city of Madurai of the Pandya
She hasn't gone through the ceremony involving
The ritual removal of the anklet from the leg.
And how far from home she is journeying!
The youth with the pointed javelin
Has led on, with his lies, her trustful self
Into the desert wastes where pools have dried up
Where the nelli berries pecked at by pigeons
And developed a hole in each of them
And brought down by the summer wind
Lie in a heap that brings to the mind
Beads of crystal with holes, that have dropped

Owing to the loss of the string that held them.
Even now the girl must be walking
Fatigued, thirsty in the barren tract;
Perhaps she would be staying in the hamlet
Where people of distinct jungle habits
Sit in the front of their dwellings that look
More like a bush, eating boiled meat
Served in teak leaves, roomy, broad!

(Akananooru 315)

The natal mother to the priest

The foster mother in eager expectancy
That the little girl with plump rounded shoulders
Who has left for the barren wastes shall come
With her youth who wields a javelin, back
Has painted the outer walls and filled with sand
The open courtyard and beautified the house
With garlands, hanging for the youthful couple to feel
Happy, relaxed, when they are back, O priest,
I happen to be her natal mother who bore
This shy, timid girl with the eyes of a doe.
She may not think much of a mother's rights
But I have dressed the hair of this smiling girl
Many a time, have carried her as a babe
Helped her to groom herself and deck with ornaments,
Have cared for her these long years. Will he
The young man think of all that I have done

For her. I would be happy if he does!
Wise priest, loose-swathed, with a mighty tuft of hair
With a curved stick of many knobs of one of which
Hangs a bag, O wise man, who read the future!
Will he, this youth bring back my dear girl
Home to me to still my tears and assuage
My aching heart that banishes from me
A moment's sleep of nights, or will he not?
Perhaps he might set his course straight on
Towards his home, his own home, with her?
What are the young man's plans? Please read
Your berries well and tell me, priest
What things they foretell, how the future lies!

(Akananooru 195)

The foster-mother on her discovery that her daughter had eloped the previous night

Last night after a bout of sleep
I found my girl had rolled away
And wishing to fold her in my embrace
I tried to move to where she lay.
But she said she perspired and seemed inclined
To stay away at the edge of the bed
I now know why my holding her
In a tight embrace was distasteful -
My little girl whose body smell

Is nicer far than the full-blown blossom
Of vengai and kantal on the cloud-topped hill
Ruled by Ay - my girl whose touch
Is cooler far than the ambal bloom.
I realise now why she waved away
My advances to hold her tight.

(Kuruntokai 84)

Book 4

The Pain of Parting

Pating from loved ones is part of man's and woman's lot in life. There can be no man or woman who has not experienced the anguish of parting, sometime or other. The price of love - love of all kinds - is separation; and the greater the love, the greater is the grief of separation. Sangam love lyrics are full of lovers parting and the anguish and the accusations resultant therefrom. Men had to travel away from their place to make money and money is needed not only for running the home but to discharge the sacred obligations of a householder like hospitality to all that seek it of him. They promise to return with the first rains but their plans go away and the love-lorn woman pines away at home, thinking hard thoughts of the lover. The man is no happier as he too longs for reunion and he is fully aware of how his girl will suffer on account of his extended absence.

The pain of parting has been described under the mullai, the neidal and the palai modes in Sangam love literature. Parting may happen to married couples as well as to pairs in love before marriage. All parting of lovers has been brought under this section as essentially the sentiment is the same despite the technical variations. The reader may keep in mind the basic tenet of Sangam love lyrics that no parting can be permanent, that lovers parted will certainly meet and all will be bliss again. Suffering, there certainly is, but no irredeemable sorrow in Sangam love literature.

The young man to the girl

Darling, you fear the very words said
By me to still your fears, my dearest,
Whose plaited hair gives off the scent
Of kuvalai blooms, whose mouth oozing
Sweet honey resembles the ambal blossom,
Whose skin sports comely spots
That are like the pollen from the lotus flower
That blossoms in the deep mountain pools.
I do not contemplate exchanging

This liaison with you for the world surrounded
By the sea on whose shore, on the spreading sands
Perch the flocks of short-footed swans.

(Kuruntokai 300)

The young man to himself

When I ventured out
Earlier on my travels,
I had no journey through
A tract of dried-up bamboos
(Kept up by tangled roots)
That make a sound resembling
The sigh of a tusker, tied up
The moon rose over the hills
And I stood contemplating
On the one I value most
And addressed the moon, saying,
"I too possess a moon
Full, effulgent, with teeth
That are pointed like thorns
And a handsome, fragrant forehead,
Back home in the distant land
Beyond these rocky hills
Where stand leafless trees
Denuded by the wind,

The violent, burning wind
That roars the while it blows!"

(Narrinai 62)

The young man to himself

If I choose to spend the days with her,
I shall be happy but may not gather wealth.
If I leave for distant lands to earn,
I shall forfeit the joys of married life.
So mind of mine, choose wisely if you want
To stay at home or travel far to earn
It has been said that wealth is gone in a trice
Like the path of a fish on water in a pond.
Listen, my mind! For I have chosen well;
Even if the earth that's girt by seas
Forms the measure and seven such measures of wealth
Are proffered all to me, in truth I shall
Turn it down; for vanquished by her glances
From her moise eyes that are shot with blood-red veins,
By her side shall I my life expend!
Wealth may go to where it's welcome most.
I wish it well but I've chosen, I'm content!

(Narrinai 16)

The young man to himself

She's young and sweet; her tresses dense
Are cool and long and scented.

Her shoulders supple are bamboo-like
You now plan to leave her.
You sure would have done what's difficult to do
If you can leave her to journey
Through trackless wastes where the bed of a stream
Is dried up and living things suffer
And there is no shade from the pitiless sun
Except the omai with the trunk
All bent, broken by the depredations
Of a tusker eager to feed
Its youthful mate with a ponderous head,
All for the love of lucre!
You have my blessing, you proceed ahead
You can do it, O mind of mine!

(Narrinai 137)

The young man to himself

You wish to travel through the desert
That you may garner wealth.
But think deep! For the desert elephant
All dusty with the earth
Scampering fast with a wish to kill
But frustrated in finding
No hapless traveller walking the wastes
Falls upon the palm trees
Whose fruit green when they are young
Turn red on maturing

Destroys them to work off its rage.
If you feel this wealth
So hard earned will make you happy
Remember, then, that youth
Is the greatest wealth that one can have
For after youth is past
Wealth cannot renew the pleasures of love!
If you wish to pursue still
Evanescent wealth, may your plans prosper!
I shall not go with you!

(Narrinai 126)

The young man to himself

I suffer torments, O mind of mine
On her account now
When I plan to leave on a journey
To distant lands to earn.
Though set free by the kindly hunter
The white decoy crane
With the tender shoots of the eengai stroking
Gently the back of its body
Suffers torments from the cold and the rain
Cowering with both wings tucked,
The clouds making a sunlit day
Dark and gloomy as the night.
In like manner my own girl gifted
With handsome, youthful breasts

And charming markings on her flawless skin
Would shiver as if the moon
Shed rays of cold in summer time
Even when I stayed with her,
During the moments when my grip was loosened!
If now I journey forth
To garner wealth, how shall my girl
Survive the desolate winds
That blow from the north on wintry nights
Ceaseless, bitter, cold?

(Narrinai 312)

The young man to the girl

You fear the very words uttered by me
To still your fears, my darling girl,
Whose plaited hair gives off the scent
Of kuvalai blooms, whose mouth oozing
Sweet honey resembles the ambal flower,
Whose skin sports comely spots
That are like the pollen from the lotus flower
That blossoms in the deep mountain pools.
I do not contemplate exchanging
This liaison with you for the world surrounded
By the sea on whose shore, on the sands
Perch the flocks of short-footed swans.

(300)

The friend of the girl to the boy

The billows that leap from the frothing sea
With foam on their crests like the hair of the aged
Dashing, crush into a shapeless mass
The mud homes sculpted by the girls at play,
The love between you and my friend blossomed
On this shore on a fateful day
And from the few who were in on this
The many came to know and gossip wove
A nightmare tale of secret happenings
Growing in size as it went the rounds
Till mother heard it and exploded
In a towering rage; she forbade the girl
From moving about at liberty;
She's now a prisoner in her own home!
She pines for you through the endless day
And all through the endless night.
I know how much you love here, chieftain,
I know how ardently you long
To press her heaving bosom tight
To your expansive chest. I haven't the heart
To counsel you to forget her
I know you cannot, even if you try,
From certain signs I gather you plan
To leave for distant lands to garner
A hoard of wealth which you will place
Before her parents as the price of the bride.

If such be your plan, forsake it, chieftain,
For, whom you love can well be yours
If openly you ask for her hand
In all candour, without a talk
Of bride's prices, if mustering courage,
You talk to her father, as man to man.
But, youthful chieftain, if you plan
To earn and pay the price of the bride,
If you desire with gold to buy her,
Not all the wealth of the Kosar city
whose clamorous streets are frothy rivers
Carrying the flood of commerce
Can buy my friend from off her parents!

(Akananooru 90)

The friend of the girl to the young man

Chieftain you say you plan to go
On a journey to acquire wealth,
Traversing the barren tracts
Where elephants, tired and thirsty
Pursue a mirage, thinking they can
Quench their killer of a thirst.
I heard your well; now listen to me
For I have something to say
In pursuance of your journey plans.
You started to check your bow

By tying the string and testing it
By twanging it for tension.
She happened to see it and lo! the sequel!
Her moon-like face was masked
By the cloud of pallor which spread over it
Its lustre fading away!
Tightening your armstring, you began to test
And select your weapons of war.
A glimpse of that and lo! the sequel!
Her eyes shed copious tears
Even like the blue-bell blooming in the pool
Oozing water after rains.
Without a thought of the pain you are causing,
Your mind fixed on wealth,
You began to polish your triumphant discuss
On seeing which her bangles
Came off and scattered like kantal flowers
Snipped by the constant wind.
So reflect, chieftain, if she undergoes
Such pain, when she beholds
The steps you take in pursuance
Of your plans to leave
What shall befall her, what cruel fate
If you leave on your journey in truth?
And if she dies, as well she might,

Will all the wealth you earn
Bring her back to life from the dead
When you come back from your travels?

(Kalitokai - Palai 6)

The friend of the girl to the young man, preparing to travel alone, leaving the girl behind

If you maintain that desert tracts are harsh
And they torment the hapless traveller, chieftain,
- Tracts grown over with omai trees, that look
Like an once-teeming, busy town where groups
Of salt merchants stayed for a time and left,
A bustling city forlorn, now, deserted,
If desert tracts are unpleasant, then, chieftain,
Will the lonely home prove pleasant to live for her?

(Kuruntokai 124)

The friend of the girl to the young man

You are keen to go!
If I let you go
She feels anguished
But, on her account
If I prevent you,
I shall be the target
Of innuendos
From many directions.
So proceed, as planned,

On your journey, chieftain
And complete your task,
But do not tarry
In the distant land!
Remember, chieftain,
How, even when together
And in tight embrace -
So tight, her bosom
Bears impressions
Of your manly chest -
She feels cold
In the middle of the night!
You plan to leave
And the bleak north wind
Is already here
Rustling the shoots
In a gentle fashion,
After a mild shower.
Bear it in mind
And make your plans!

(Narrinai 229)

The girl to her friend

What cn we say to keep the chieftain from starting on his travels? -

The chief who promised he never would leave never would part from me?

He's of a loving disposition, he has a noble mien

And, more than all, the spring has come heralding summer time,

The spring when the kura puts forth shoots, and then a wealth of buds

And the red-eyed cuckoo, perching on the branches of the mango tree in bloom

Sends out notes, sweet and matching as if counselling,

"O lovers among you! Hasten, now to merge in joyous union!"

If spring is with us, then summer, dear, cannot be far behind!

But he wants to journey through the desert, barren, lifeless, dry

With gaunt trees leafless and branching paths where marauders, bow in hand

Stalk in stealth for the hapless traveller, How can we, dear, reason

With a person wishing to travel far, facing all these dangers

Rather than stay, with the season propitious, with me to share the bliss?

(Narrinai 224)

The friend of the girl to her

Listen to this, it's sure to bring a smile

To your lips, my dear with tresses rich - and long!

I learn the chief now plans to go away

To distant lands to gather wealth expecting

His wife to stay right where she is, await

Till he can travel back to her, enriched

Expecting her to keep alive through all

That endless time through lonely nights awake
With crashing claps of thunder striking terror
In snakes that spread their speckled bands in panic.
He expects this. it's certain to make you smile!

(Narrinai 129)

The girl to her husband

The rains fail totally; the jungle cows
Are forced to feed on the cacti stems.
The bone-dry path goes over boulders
Hard to tread; and brigands stalk
The hapless wayfarer, aiming arrows.
Even these natives are quite oppressed
By the heat and the thirst with water-holes dry,
The only damp spots one can see
Are where the tears of the suffering have fallen
You have been painting all these horrors
Of the trackless wastes, as if you are
Unaware of the way I shall respond!
It does not befit a person of your stamp!
You stop counselling with loveless words
And take me with you over the barren deserts
With misery as our sole companion.
Come on, chieftain, we shall face
All the terrors of the journey together!

Can there be bliss greater for us
Than this, O chieftain, our being together?

(Kalitokai - Palai 5)

The girl to her friend who asks her if she can bear the pangs of separation if the lover leaves for distant climes for some reason

If he chooses to leave, the chief
Of extensive lands on the shore of the sea
Where the flock of red-mouthed gulls
Feeling the cold of the water drops
Drenching their backs resort to the bowers
Where a colourful range of flowers blooms,
If the chief does leave, what else have we
To lose, my dear, but our own life?

(Kuruntokai 334)

The girl addresses a cock

O cock that crowed at dawn today
You bear a comb on your head that is red
As a newly opened kanthal blossom!
You've ended the night of my joyous union
With the chief of the fertile cities of the plain
Well-watered with rivers running deep -
You crowed at your loudest, heralding dawn,
Heralding the end of the joyous night!
You richly deserve to be seized by the cat,
The jungle cat that looks for rats,

Not to be bolted in a matter of moments,
But kept in store to be eaten at leisure
For days on end! You sure deserve,
O cock that crowed, such a grievous fate!

(Kuruntokai 107)

The boy, to himself

My heart! How sad, how passing sad's your plight!
The village square has vanished from my view
I see no longer the line of trees around.
The sweetest village where she lives alone
I shall journey through desert wastes resounding
To the noise of hordes returning with the cattle
The spoils of a battle fought with fire-brands and arrows
Speeded by the fiercest hearts that never knew
The tender promptings pity awakens : I shall wander
Over many a land in restless search of wealth
Feeling, of an evening when lovely well-dressed girls,
Worship the crescent of the moon, the deepest ache in the heart
At my being kept away from the one I love
The dearest girl who even yesterday
Said, "Will you not in search of wealth elusive
Keep putting off your journey back to me in torment?
Is this not how every male turns out in the end to be
While pursuing the worldly goods? O tell me, 'tis not true!"
Few were the words my girl did lisp but oh!

Deep in the heart these words of hers ensconced
Shall torment me to the end of time: her home
And the sweetest village where she lives, the line of trees
And the village common, all are vanished from my view!
When, O when shall luckless I feast once again
My anguished eyes on the village scenes I love?
When, O when shall I come back to live
With her I love in endless bliss, unparted?

(Akananooru 239)

The girl to her friend

In the shore of the sea where he rules,
Budding blooms are rich with the water
Sprinkling on them from the restless waves,
Buds on trees giving greatful shade
To flocks of cranes which find shelter
And sweet slumber through all the day.
But he goes on his travels, leaving me
To sorrow in barren loneliness
And I can't sleep, my eyes, dearest
Do not close in a minute's repose!
Tell me, friend, can this, in truth
Be the love disease they talk about?

(Kuruntokai 5)

The girl addresses the brook coming from her lover's hill :

Brook that rise in the chieftain's hill,
Where a tusker rendered debilitated
Through grievous injuries sustained in fighting
A giant hill tiger, now in the company
Of its loving mate nibbles at the bamboo,
You sound like the musical instrument
Mad of bamboo that grows in the hill
When you come down; now enriched
With waxing floods, you breach your banks!
Are you worried that I shall feel
Aggrieved at your callousness
That you care so little for the chief's neglect
Of one who loves him, whose jewels slip
And shoulders shrink, whose comely forehead
Is whiter far than the konrai blossom
Whose eyes let flow a steady stream
Of anguished tears? Are you afraid
That I shall demand to know from you
If this conduct of the chieftain
Is in accord with the moral law?
You conceal your body of waters
With the flowers falling along your course;
You look bashful; he has sent you
Fully flooded with the monsoon rains
But forsaken you, forsaken me.
He has the grit, the ruthlessness

To do this, brook; but do not mind him!
But why cannot you slow down your flow
And stay for a while in the shade of the trees,
The vengai trees with the flame-like flowers
And with your floods enjoy a sojourn
In the woods of my father that can compare
With those in the long range of the golden mountains
Of the Aryan people? Do you feel
Your splendour will get wraped, O brook
If you slow down your course and flow near me?

(Akananooru 398)

The girl to herself :

The middle of the night is dark with gloom.
All talk suspended, the people of the place
Have settled down to a deep slumber.
With passions calmed, the world extensive
Is all enjoying a sleep of peace.
Only I in all this world
Can't sleep a wink all the long night through.

(Kuruntokai 6)

The girl to her friend :

Dearest, if I fear
The scandal spreading far
My love shall fade away.
If I dry up my love,

To stop the calumny
What's left with me
Is only my bashfulness.
Look, even like the branch
Broken by an elephant,
Standing at an angle
Not touching the ground below,
With the fibrous bark showing
Are my feminine graces
Devoured by the chieftain!

(Kuruntokai 112)

The girl praying to the gods

People aver that the awesome gods
That inhabit the tree in the square
Punish the wicked : by no means wicked
Is my self of hilly domains.
Me? - a pallor spreads on my forhead
My shoulders have weakened and the arm bands loosened
Only because of the love I bear
For him : he is innocent, wholly blameless!

(Kuruntokai 87)

The girl to her friend

My lord has left for barren desert tracts
A long time since rainless, barren wastes
Where the elephant cow afflicted by the heat

And burning thirst moves on to outer hills,
Its calf, befuddled, missing its mother walks,
Confused like women from distant suburbs forced
To enter the heart of a teeming bustling city,
Joining for comfort a herd of village calves.
You ask me, dear, to sleep and rest. Like one
Who has lost a priceless gem that's set
In an ornament that's wrought with care and skill,
How can I rest, how sleep! These eyes of mine
That used to sleep when I could lay my head
On his chest with eager loving heart
At dead of night when ghouls perambulate -
How can they sleep with him and I thus parted!

(Narrinai 171)

The girl to her friend

The Kongu trees have put out shoots
Which get plucked little by little.
The cuckoon perched on the lofty branch
Of the mango tree from which oozes
Sweet honey is sending out
The sweetest notes. The Cauvery
Which had flooded both its banks,
(The high waters that drowned the oars)
Is now running almost dry,
The powerful bull that had fed replete
On the runner-grass, with its moving lump

In the company of its mate, they cow
Drinks the water coloured by dirt
Flowing in the broad-deep canals as if
It has just now rained in torrents,
Till their thirst and fatigue are quelled
And lies down on the sandy dunes
Heaped up high by the constant wind
Along with the cow and sleeps at peace,
Their bodies getting powdered with
The golden pollen that keeps falling
From the wreath-like flowers of the kanchi tree
With its narrow trunk, that spreads a shade
Over the sand hills. This in truth
Is the summer, dear which yields fresh bouts
Of joy to those who have their mates
By their side. But what is the pleasure
We derive from the summer season?
What indeed does urge us now
To live on, dear? I see nothing
For which we now should hold on to life!
I do not feel we shall long survive!

(Akananooru 341)

The girl to the friend

He doesn't live in far-off lands
With hills and woods impassable.
How does tarry near where we live,

He could have come many a time
To dry my tears; but no! he would'nt.
He stayed off like the hermit-folk
Who shun the teeming haunts of men
In pursuit of their sacred vows.
'Tis true enough, dear, I felt for him
A passion that once did incline me
To forgive him his many faults,
But not any longer! He has ceased to evoke
My boundless love, my forgivance.

(Kuruntokai 203)

The friend to the girl

Do not lose hope, for he loves your well!
And he shall return to made you happy
He shall be back from the desert walks
Where the elephant peels the juicy bark
Of the yaam tree that he may feed
His hungry mate; the animal lover's
Solicitude for his mate in torment
Shall furnish him with the fleetest wings
To hurry home to dry your tears!

(Kuruntogai 37)

The young man to himself in his army camp

My wife is lucky. She has our son
For charming company. He plays on his toy drum

Wrought in silver with handsome stripes
Laughing in the course of his childish pranks
Displaying his tongue that's lacquer-like
Red, with spots, imbibes milk
And goes round threatening all and sundry
With a stick upraised, delighting the hillmen
With pleasantly puzzling conundrums.
My lot is different; I keep awake
Listening to the sound the incessant rain
Makes in the field of battle, with a wind
Cold, unremitting, blowing at me
All alone in my battle camp
With my misery unrelieved
By such company!

(Narrinai 341)

The girl to her friend

The sun with his scorching rays has set
I do not hear the tinkling of the bells
Of the Chieftain's chariot even at night -
The chariot that rolls on so fast, its wheels
Cut the adambu creepers to pieces.
My malady torments beyond bearing;
You counsel me to stop crying
How can I when the hear is anguished!
The male stork replete with fish from the sea
Flies up to its nest on the palm tree growing

In the village square full of the stench of fish
And sends out notes of anguish calling
Its mate with the mouth curved at the end
To fly to the nest to relieve its loneliness.
I hear the calls, how can I
Bear up my anguish, how stem my tears?

(Narrinai 338)

The girl to the friend

I do restrain my inner longing
But these, my eyes, from out of their hold
Over me weep copious tears
As they have seen the chief of the hills
Where the boys who tend the cattle notice
The vengai tree in the village square
In verdant bloom and set up a roar
Around the tree without climbing it,
The roar, the joyous shouts of the children
Echoing through the mountain caverns,
My eyes are in tears; I cannot stem them!

(Kuruntokai 341)

The girl to the friend

He left on his travels at the precise moment
When all the birds at even tide,
Headless of the pain they caused to people
Separated from their beloved mates,

Sang out the sweetest notes of bliss

Celebrating their coming together,

He parted at the hour when the air was full

With the joyful notes of mating birds!

Now, when he comes back, a stranger to me,

I shall tell him, "Do not start

To dress my tresses as of old!

Don't come near me! Do not touch me!"

Just you wait till he comes to me

In an attitude of appeasement!

Just you wait and watch me say this!

(Kuruntokai 191)

(This is said in anger and sorrow by the girl to her friend)

The girl to her friend

I cannot, dear sleep in peace

In my state of grief occasioned by

The chieftain who left, long ago,

For distant lands travelling over

Trackless wastes with yam trees growing

Where the wayfarer is subject to

A thousand hardships. But harder far
For me is to bear my friend's sorrow
Like the deaf-mute who has seen with his eyes
The torments suffered by the cow that has fallen
Into the well, I suffer in silence
Agonies beyond bearing.

(Kuruntokai 224)

The girl to her friend

He hasn't returned, Now it's winter, dear
When a bitter cold wind has started blowing hard
And the pair of anril perched on the lofty branch
Of the tada tree, the male bird with the head
Red like flaming fire and the mate with the beak
Curved like the prawn, the pair all night keeps on
Sending notes of the deepest passion breaking
The hearts of lonely lovers! It's wintertime
And he isn't back! How can you come to me
With tales of how the chief shall hurry back
In time to marry me?

(Kuruntokai 160)

The girl to herself

The restless sea is silent, asleep
Like Tirumal with the strains of the lute,
Put to sleep with the lullaby
Sung by the bees from the punnai blooms

And the dragon-flies in unison.
Everything is in restful slumber
But my restless mind, you labour on!
In the pervading gloom did you find him -
The heartless fiend who fanned in you
This love-disease that defies theraphy?

In the gathering dusk where sharks abound
You wander seeking him that gave you
This love-disease that's past enduring.
You longed to fold him in tight embrace;
Were you fulfilled, O mind of mine?

At eventide when flocks of birds
Come to roost in the copse of trees
You went about in search of him
On whose account my bangles slip
Could you divine his deepest thoughts,
Could you read him, O mind of mine?
You seek the villain day and night
Even like the ebb and flow
Of the restless water in the creek
You seek the one that injured you
You panted for a merger with the faithless one.
Could you run down the fugitive?

Could you secure him, my senseless mine,
That deserve indeed the deepest pity?

(Kalitogai - Neidal 6)

The girl to her friend

The clouds have spread
All over the sky
And send out claps
Of deafending thunder
Like the drums beaten
By triumphant kings
And it has been raining
Incessantly.
The lover stays out
In distant lands,
Without a thought
Of us in anguish.
The flowers of eengai
Soft and colourful
Have started falling
And the cold season,
Tormenting, bitter
Is before us!
What shall we do?
How shall we now
Endure it, dear?

(Kuruntokai 380)

The girl to the friend

He keeps away! And the mullai blooms!
When the shepherds wielding the hooked stick
Came home driving their sheep in the gloaming
And a youth among them called at ours
To barter milk for a measure of grain
I saw him decked with mullai buds
In the hair of his head-tiny buds
Still green in their casing, unopened still;
I saw them, dear, the mullai buds,
I did see them with my own eyes!

(Kuruntokai 221)

The girl to the friend

Misled by the love of wealth
He left me anguished for distant parts
With no thought of the evanescence,
Of youth : nor back he comes to me,
Nor sends me tidings of where he is
Though swear he did that he would be
Home with me with the first showers.
My plight in such: and now the rain
The canny slut, with the mullai bloom
She has nurtured, for her teeth

Must laugh at this, my simple faith
That he shall yet come back to me!

(Kuruntokai 126)

The girl to her friend

The blistering wind from the north
Opens the buds of the neelam
And shakes the karuvilai bloom
That looks like the eye of the feather
Of peacocks; the wind blows on
To shake down the eengai blossom
Small and tender from
The plant with slender thorns.
The north wind, bitter, cold
Blows on, making me
Suffer endless anguish,
Since he cares so little
How I am faring, dear,
What is he to me,
Whether he comes or not!

(Kuruntokai 110)

The girl to her friend

Rain clouds play about at the top of the hill,
In the hamlet at the foot of the hill, the cattle
Out for grazing, now wend their way
Homewards, filled with thoghts of their claves.

The shiny mullai blooms in the meadow
Remainding one of the evening skies!
I cannot, dear, hold on to life
Much longer, now; I known I'm finished

(Kuruntokai 108)

The girl to her friend

Can there be a girl desiring
The expansive chest of the mountain chief
Who lacks feelings of pity for those
Afflicted with the love-diesase-
The chief in whose mountain domain
A tusker battles its foe with all
The ferocity of Lord Muruga,
Getting its silvern tusks ruddy
With the blood of the battle, where the plantain
Yields a cluster of flowers shaped
Like the coiffured bund of comely maidens?
Cane love-lorn girls on whose breasts
A sickly pallor spreads - the breasts
That lack crafted ornaments
And anointing with fragrant paste -
Can they desire the chest of the chief
Who doesn't feel for those who love him,
And expect to get their love requited?

(Narrinai 225)

The girl to her friend

The cuckoo with its mate united
Still sits alone and keeps up its song
The water in the brooks runs clear.
All this acts like a spear opening
The old wound in the hearts of parted lovers,
The wound in the heart that does not heal.
But crueller far than the cuckoo's notes
And the water in the streams running clear
Is the seller of flowers, the daughter of a farmer
Whose basket of blooms is covered by bees,
Hawking them in the streets of our town
Crying in tones loud and clear
"Won't you buy my kurukkathi
With its dainty down, just plucked from the creeper?
Won't you buy my pithi bloosm -
The flower that blooms in rich dense clusters?"

(Narrinai 97)

The girl to her friend

In the Chieftain's hills
The valiant boar that feeds
On the little millet grains
Lives with its mate.
If he loves me so,
Does his love include

A potion that can make
Even him return,
Back to me, my dear?

(Ainkurunooru 162)

The friend of the girl to the young man

Chief of the beaches where, on the sands,
The restless waves of the sea
Pile lustrous pearls which glisten in the light!
Listen to my counsel and act!
Fame deserts him who turns his face
From the one to sorrow given
If you covet fame, go assuage
The heart that is badly riven!

(Aintinai Aimbadu 48)

The friend of the girl to the boy

Chieftain, on the slopes of your hill
Waterfalls cascade down with a roar
That echoes to the high heavens long after
The rains of the night have ceased to be.
Her heart's involvement with you shall
Flourish even if you do not meet!
Her love shall live on undiminished,
Unnourished by nightly tryst.

(Kuruntokai 42)

When my lord that is dear as my eyes
Returns after this prolonged absence
Do I display dudgeon or, prompted
By my love-lorn state, do I
Embrace him with pent-up love
Or do I mix these widely-varied,
These opposite types of behaviour?
What do I do when back he comes?

(T.K.1267)

On his leaving,
My shoulders thinned out
And the clasps will not stay.
You spoke ill
Of his conduct
On seeing this.
I now suffer
Mental torments
From your words
Accusing him.

(T.K.1236)

I never learnt how much trouble
Evenings could create for me
Until my husband left on his travels
Until I tasted separation.

(T.K.1226)

The girl to the friend

There are mango trees with green little fruits
On branches moved by the breeze
On the sandy bank hard by the boulder
And the pool of crystal water
On the slope of the mountain where honey is gathered.
The dark cuckoo birds
With handsome eyes, perching on the branches
In the midst of the foliage dense,
In the joyful company of their loving mates
Send out dulcet notes
As if warning those who would part
With their loves to travel :
"O people, listen, men of sense,
Do not leave your mates,
Urged by the wish to go in search
Of glamorous, tinsel wealth
Which is not the kind to be relied on,
Which often plays you false
Even like the dice which are used in gambling!"
Despite this clear warning
Conveyed in these musical notes
Through the enchanting air of Spring,
If men can leave and stay away
All to gather wealth

Then wealth must be reckoned as the greatest of all
The values which we cherish!

(Narrinai 243)

The friend of the girl to her, assuring her that even among the desert animals there is so much love and her lover is sure to draw a lesson from their lives and return soon

A deer and his mate walking along
In a dried-up desert were smitten with thirst
In time they saw a water-hole
They cantered fast, the male in lead.
Seeing how little water there was
Inb the hole, the stag decided on
A subterfuge. It went down and put
Its mouth in the water and made a noise
Blowing out, not sucking in
The precious fluid. His mate, convinced
That the stag had its fill went down
And imbibed to its heart's content.
The solicitude of the thirsty stag
Its anxiety to sacrifice
Is surely the measure of the truest love!

(Aintinai Aimbadu 38)

The girl to the friend

May you live long! How can pallor
Spread on my comely forehead?
For never has the chief of seashore lands

Left my loving heart.
In his compact village on the shore of the sea
Fishermen leave in boats
Equipped with harpoons with points sharp
Tied to stout long ropes
And return home with powerful lamps
At break of dawn with the catch
Which they heap on the sands near the bower
And, seated all in the shade
Of the tall punnai, they quaff the toddy
Mixed with honey, feeling
Relaxed, at ease with duty done,
Enjoying the company!
The chief stays on, never left my heart,
In truth, I do not grieve!

(Narrinai 388)

The friend of the girl to her

Let us be up and venture out to watch the millet fields

Stem your tears, do not weep for tears can blast your charm!

Do not cry in front of all these other people, dear,

For that would urge the tongues to wag - the tongues of the village folk!

Your comely eyes are shot with red like the killer arrow drawn

From the greedy pigs that wander deep into the fields of growing millet -

The arrow shot and drawn by hunters with ruthless unconcern.

Let us hurry! For I can hear pirate parrot flocks
All unconscious that the peacock shut up in the cage
Is standing witness, land on the field to crop the millet ears -
Daring thieves in merry plume, the dark green of their body
Set sharply off by the red of their beak, against the golden bloom
Of the vengai tree, efflorescent, on the verdant mountain slope!
Let us go out to chase them off; do not weep, my dearest!

(Narrinai 13)

The friend of the girl to her

Do not feel tormented that our dear chieftain
Shall suffer anguish from the heat,
Shall be facing dire danger
Fromk the tiger roaming in the barren tracts
For did he not, dear, when he set out on his travels
Ask, "Dear girl, with lovely tresses,
Will you not come with me to tread
The paths where it rains with flashes of lightning
Where the gazelle rubbing its body against
The kumil tree can bring down the fruits,
Fruits of a golden colour that look
Rather like the jewels girls love to wear?"
Remember his words and stem your fears!

(Narrinai 274)

The girl to herself

Having spread his multi-splendoured rays to make
The bright warm day the sun is sinking o'er west
The birds have flown to be with their young in the nests
The sturdy buck now frisks about with the loving doe
The mullai blooms all o'er the lea; in ev'ry bush
The thonri blossoms lighting up the gloom around
The cattle wend their homeward way; and the bells
Around their necks send up the purest strains to mix
With the notes of the flutes the cowherds play a gloaming
While with curved sticks they drived their cattle home -
Music kind to all the world but cruel beyond bearing
To me, to lonely souls; are evenings never seen
With all their terrors in the distant land beyond
Where he has gone to garner heaps of gold and things?

(Narrinai 69)

The friend of the girl

The youthful elephant calf
Playing games with the children,
Of the hillman girl of the hamlet
Where toddy freely flows
Became the pet of the place,
Only to gobble up later
The millet the hillmen had planted,
Such is the case with the chieftain

Whose earlier playful laughter
Has turned out now to be bitter.

(Kuruntokai 394)

The girl to her friend

My dear, with the comely forehead,
No one plunders a tree
For therapic herbs to the point where
The tree itself is killed;
Men of penance, do not perform
Austerities, likewise,
To that point where they perish;
Kings do not bleed to death
The land they rule when they levy taxes!
I know this, my dear;
But he does not and tarries long
To earn in distant countries.
Of what avail is wealth to him
If I die in the meantime?
He has failed to note that the only goal
Of all such effort is bliss.
Wise men declare that love of money
Seizes hold of men.
This has been so, with all men, dear,
At all times, everywhere!

(Narrinai 226)

The girl to her friend

My beauty that has been praised so high
By the bevy of girls that play on the shore
Is now lost. But more distasteful
Than its loss will be the wide
Exposure of the evil wrought
By the chieftain of seashore lands
Where the thalai with its saw-like leaves
Rich, verdant, grows like a fencing
Of planted javelins; this exposure
Will be far more hateful, if such a thing happens!

(Kuruntokai 245)

The girl to her friend

If he does not need
To communicate with me,
Why does he fail to send
A winged messenger,
(The expert at the art
Of leaving his girl behind).
To the vengai tree that stands
On a wing of our house, dear,

His stoutest comrade sweet
Through all those lonesome nights.

(Kuruntokai 266)

(Through the reference to the tree, she dolefully suggests how ardent a lover he had been, at the time of the early courtship)

The girl to her friend

He kept on telling me
He'd be starting on his travels,
I thought that it was all
His usual empty talk
Never meant by him
To be taken in seriousness
And I told him, dearest
"You leave me for good!"
What a tragic sequel
To my words of petulance!
He started on his journey
Without telling us
For which place he was bound,
He is our support
Our final anchorage;
Where is he living now?
The tears from my eyes
Fill the interspace
Between my burgeoning breasts

Making it a pool
Where produly strut the cranes
With lean, dusky legs!

(Kuruntokai 325)

The girl to her friend

You notice, dear, how on my skin,
A sickly pallor spreads
Even like the dark-green moss
Growing on the water
That keeps away when people use
The water in the pond.
It retreats at the lover's touch;
And, when he keeps away,
It spreads all over like the moss
That covers all the pond.

(Kuruntokai 399)

The girl to herself

The spark of love that entered me
Through the orifice of my eager eyes
Has burnt my insides; I cannot have
The fire quenched with his cooling glance,
With the embrace that can vitalise:
Neither can I call on him
Nor can we meet at a rendezvous.
My inner fires rage: I pine
And waste away. I sure shall die

Not with a flourish but an obscure death
Not like the prized fighting cock
Whose evey move the eager throng
Lauds in frenzied admiration,
Which, between bouts is kept away
And nursed with tender solicitude,
And dies like a king, in the battlepit,
The cynosure of the spectators.
But I shall pine my life away
With none to salve my bruised heart
And die obscure and no one wiser,
Even like the cocks that fight to death
On the lowly dust-heap in the village street
The mangy cocks of the meanest bearing
Obscure waifs of no account
Whom none notices, no one misses.

(Kuruntokai 305)

The girl to the friend

These others around do counsel me
To bear in patience all the heart-ache
Engendered by my love for him.
Do these wise men know the torment
Of a love-lorn bosom or are they those
Of rock-like grit that can overcome

The misery wrought by the loved one
Who stays away? I, then, am not
One of them. For when he keeps away
Like this, for months and we do not meet
My heart is filled with the deepest grief
My body, day by painful day
Slowly wastes away; my life
Like the froth on the crest of the wave that beats
On the rock in the beach shall wear away
Into airy nothingness.

(Kuruntokai 290)

The girl to her friend

The chief met me on a moonlit night
Before he left on his travels -
The chief of the hills, where, on the slopes
In the shallow pool, the toads
Set up a roar like the beat of drums -
He came to take my leave,
Decked, my dear, with mullai blooms
And embraced my shoulders tight.
He left me, true, for distant climes
But look, my shoulders still

Give off the bouquet of the mullai blooms,
The scent is fresh on them!

(Kuruntokai 193)

The girl, now married, to her friend

He did travel to distant lands, but in my mind
He has been present all this time, enthroned,
He was nigh and never distant. Furthermore
All the time that he did tarry far away,
The waves from the sea that beat on his village waft
Softly on to the frontal porch in my hamlet
Dense with the spreading thazhai plants whose buds
Blossom wide like the wings of storks extended
And travel back to the chieftain's village on the fringe!

(Kuruntokai 228)

The girl to her friend

However kind and considerate he may have been
Let us banish, friend of mine, all thoughts
Of him. Let this my debilitation continue!
Let no one feel unhappy on that count!
What kind of friend is he that leaves behind
His love to grieve; to waste her life away?
Even like a sandal tree cut off
By hillmen draped in garments made of yarn

Of fibre from the maral tree, unknowing,
Languishing with dried up leaves, a sight
Exciting pity in the mountain slopes, I pine
And waste away; my mind and heart to him
Have flown; my body lacking them has shrunk
My state is such that even if he comes
My body cannot gain its wonted tone.
Let him not, dear, try to hasten back;
He should be spread the painful agony
Of witnessing the total wreck I am!

(Narrinai 64)

The girl speaks

O sea, your foam-crested waves,
White like the tazhai bloom
Dash endless all the day
And all through the endless night,
Against his far-flung shore
Where flocks of silvern gulls
Feast on the teeming fish.
Your lament, O sea, is heard
Unremitting all the day
And all through the silent night.
You must suffer, sea,
From the pangs of separation!
I know the malady;

You too are doubtless smitten!
To whom have you lost your heart?
Whose love does make you grieve,
That you keep me company
Unwinking all the night?

(Kuruntokai 163)

The girl to the friend

Like the mahanril bird which languishes
If a lotus bloom conceals her mate
For the space of a moment from her field of vision,
I cannot bear being parted from him,
We have been together, man and wife
In all the previous births we have taken.
I would rather that we die together
Than merely exist through endless years
In cheerless loneliness.

(Kuruntokai 57)

The friend to the girl

He couldn't have ensconced himself in
The bowels of the earth or climbed to the heavens,
He could not have voyaged on the stormy sea
By walking on air: he must be somewhere!

Will he prove so hard to find
If we enquire at every house
In the towns and villages in every land
In every remote habitation?
Will he, my dear, prove elusive
If diligently we look for him,
If we search with a will to find?

(Kuruntokai 130)

The girl to the friend

At the hill of the chief I gazed intent -
The hill of the chief, where it had rained
Spurring flocks of peacocks of frisk
And celebrate while the white-faced monkey
Quaked with the cold in the company
Of its offspring, I gazed, my dear,
Intently and for long at his hill
And presto! my forehead has regained now
The sheen of old; you take a look!

(Kuruntokai 249)

The friend to the girl

The white cranes fly
In the darkening sky.
The flowering shrubs

With the bees blowing,
Open their petals.
The shoulders thin
That wear jewels
Made of conche
Get nourished to grow
To the size of the jewels
Which no longer slip.
The chief shall come
Any time now
Crossing the wastes
Where the frail omai
Beckons to its shade
The calfless cow -
The wastes on the slopes
Ruled by the clan
Of Tondaimans
Whose leading tuskers
And powerful chariots
Annexe the lands
Of enemy kings.
The chief shall be here
The soonest, dear!

The signs are good
And auspicious!

(Kuruntokai 260)

The young man to his charioteer

Drive your chariot, well-crafted, fleet
Cutting up the ground with the pressure of the wheels
Along the nice, cool path through fragrant woods
Where blossom the dusky karuvilai blooms
That look like blue gems, and the thonri
With its blood-red flowers lighting up the bushes
And the konrai whose blooms resemble coins
Of gold that are wreathed in the form of a lace,
Lighting up the branches with its dense rich clusters.
Let's hurry along this scented way
For my comely girl with the plump, round shoulders
Who loves to serve us as her welcome guests
Walks up to where our little son sleeps -
Our son with eyes like flowers opening,
And uncertain feet on which he roams
All over the house with jewels shining
Like streaks of lightning - to wake him up
With the solicitous words, "Come, my dear!"
Let us hurry, O Charioteer,
To hear these words, surpassing sweet!

(Narrinai 221)

The young man to himself

O mind of mine!
You undertook
This long journey,
Seen off by all
Kinsmen of a type
Rare to get;
You have stayed
In a distant country,
Made a heap
Of desired wealth,
Completed your
Remaining task
And with a sense
Of fulfilment
You are setting out
Homewards, now!
Homewards, O mind, through the jungle
Of lustreless iruppai trees denuded
By the burning rays of the sun, with boughs
Held low by the constant wind
With comely shoots looking like
Flaming fire and flowers with pollen.
You are setting out through a tract that is
Uninviting. She at home

Sits with her bangled hand on her cheek
Counting the dots she has put on the wall
Dots that represent the days I've been away -
Her eyes shedding tears which, tossed,
By her fingers drop on the gold earrings.
She sits on her bed strewn with flowers
Contemplating the emaciation
Suffered by her poor shoulders
And desiritng my return as the only cure
For all her ills. Will she obtain,
When she longs for a favourable omen
In the form of the movement of birds, a sign
Made by a lizard, pleasant to the ear
Presaging my coming back?

(Akananooru 351)

The friend to the boy who congratulated her on her having ensured that the girl was in good health during her absence

It sounds hollow, it's much too small -
The feast of rice, the whitest kind
That only grows in the Tondi fields
Cooked with the ghee from the cows looked after
By the skilful cowherds of Nalli's woods -
The feast that's proffered in seven plates
Warm, inviting, tempting the palate
Would seem poor as a compensation

To the benevolent crow which cawed today
In our backyard, chieftain, thus presaging
The arrival of a welcome guest.

(Kuruntokai 210)

The young man to his charioteer

Charioteer, did you know the state
of the mind of my girl when I left on my journey?
The girl I love had been chasing the crabs
That frisked about in the scented sands
Deposited by the ceaseless breakers
And tiring of the game, she was resting in the bower
Of nalal trees when I approached her
To seek her leave to go on my travels,
Urged by my greed, a disease with me!
She made no reply, but kept plucking
The nalal blossom and its tender shoots,
Crushing them in her tender hands
And dropping them on the sandy floor.
Can you picture her mental state
At the time I was leaving, O charioteer!

(Narrinai 106)

The young man, on return from his travels and being reunited with his wife, to the clouds

I've been united with the girl I love
The girl with the golden skin whose tresses

Comely, luxuriant curl at the ends.
Rain-bearing clouds with roaring thunder,
You've served the world by showering rains
During the night with a wind that scattered
The many-coloured blooms that flower in the lea,
Producing sounds like the notes from a lute
Carefully crafted by expert hands,
The padumalai notes sweet to hear
You have served us well, you can now move
And sit athwart the mountain summits.
Rain-bearing clouds, you are the axis
Round which is built the people's weal!
You are rightly held in reverence by all
The living world!

(Narrinai 139)

Book 5

The Brave, the Bevy and the Bulls

The physical background of grassy meadows is used by Sangam poets not merely to paint doleful pictures of parted lovers. Everywhere in Tamil land, cattlemen stage bullfights partly as entertainment but also as tests to prove the virility of youths who aspire to the hand of some well-endowed cowherd lass. Sangam love poets have painted vivid action pictures of such bull fights where young men perform daring feats of valour risking their lives so as to qualify for the hand of the girl they love. The following long poem is actually the product of a certain amount of editing and reorganisation of the material found in the first seven poems in Kalitokai - Mullai section, omitting only the repetitive ideas and presenting the rest in nine scenes where events move quickly and'wives are won and lives are lost'.

As this is a distinctly different kind of poetic material though anthologised under mullai, its transcomposition is presented as a separate book, distinct from that where partings are described. The transcomposer would like to add, as a postscript, that much of what is described in the following pages is still happening as an annual feature among cattlemen in the Tamil country.

The Brave, the Bevy and the Bulls

With the greening of the meadows by the copious rains
And the many-coloured blooms setting off the green -
The golden konrai and the blood-red thonri
And the kaya blue like the cloudless sky
The cowherds did not take their cattle
To the grazing grounds. The cattle fat
Were restless, constrained within their stalls
And scratched the ground looking round
In a belligerent gesture indicating
That the time for the formal baiting of bulls
Had arrived. The pails into which

The milk would be milked from the cows' udders
Were hanging idle in their receptacles
Made of cord and hung from the roof.
Most villagers disinclined
To take up work were spending the time
Playing on their bamboo flutes.
It was clearly festive time
When men (and women too) turned their mind
To relaxation, to play, to fight
To the thrills of the battle, to the thrills of romance.
The cowherds of the Pandya kingdom felt
Impelled to hold their annual fete -
The baiting of the bulls by the youth of the village
The cowherds sent up their fervent prayers
For the long life of the Pandya King
And unceasing pelf of the Pandya kingdom -
The pelf that manifests in the shape of pearls
From the billowy sea that rimmed their land
And grain from the fields and milk from the meadows.
They prayed that their beloved king
The Pandya should rise in glory and valour
And prestige among all the kings of the world.
The baiting grounds had long been readied
For the contest, the vital item of the fete.
Men and women and youth foregathered
The former to sit and follow the baiting
And the latter to jump into the frothing arena
(Now filled with the ferocious, warlike bulls).

This was the time when they battled the bulls
To tingle the blood of the spectators
To win the hand of the cowherd lass
And sculpt their name in the Hall of Fame
Through fearless feats in the jaws of death
Braving the horns of the charging bull
Maddened into a murderous rage
By rapier thrusts that bring the blood
Gushing forth to mix with the earth -
Thick ruddy fluid with the thick ruddy earth
This was the time, the season of the year
When wives are won and lives are lost
The merriest day, the maddest hour
When the heady wine of bloody battle
And the headier wine of a damsel's love
Goes to the heads of the he-man youth,
Who, all through the dreary, work-filled months
Had been living for just this moment
To be gored to death by a maddened bull,
Balladized by the girls of the village
Or come out a hero to marry the lass
That rules his heart as the matchless trophy
Of a terrible combat won by courage.
The girls too were deeply involved; they had been
Discussing the coming fete
With mounting excitement. One of them
Had lost her heart to the youthful son
Of a prosperous owner of heads of cattle.

She would not marry him, despite
This burgeoning love, unless the youth
Showed to the village in the annual fete
That he could tackle a charging bull
And bring it under his firm control.
A prouder-then-average cowherd lass
Said with a sigh, "Will I ever have
The matchless privilege, when I walk in the town,
Selling milk and butter and curds,
Of getting myself pointed out
By the people of the town who would whisper,
'There goes the girl to gain whose hand
A brave young man rushed into the fray
To vanquish a bull that was mad with rage!'
The parents and the kinsmen of such romantic girls
Were, too, of the same bent of mind;
They wouldn't insist on breast-money from suitors
They preferred to give their nubile girls
In marriage to those that dared to fight
And conquer the bulls before the cowherd crowd.

2

The snorting bulls that were foaming at the mouth
Had been let in the the ring amidst a deafening roar.
The makeshift galleries round the ring
Were quickly filled with eager villagers,
With the doe-eyed daughters of doughty cowherds
Whose handsome, eager, exicted faces

And dazzling teeth looking as if
Mullai buds and the tender feathers
Of peacocks had been set in a row,
With resplendent golden earrings dangling.
They were quickly noticed by the band of youth
Each of whom had eyes reserved
Only for the girl who had stolen his heart
To earn whose ardent approbation
He was spoiling to throw his life away.
One of them looking keenly at the bevy
Of excited girls locates the one
He loves, turns to his friend beside
And asks with a sigh of the deepest longing
"Who may that be that sits with the crowd
Making my heart enter her person?"
"She is the one" the friend replies,
"Whose father has had it drummed in the village
That only the youth that catches hold
Of the killer bull and subjugates it
Is fit to touch her lovely body!"
"Then go forth now and tell her father
That I am ready to tackle the bull!"
Replied the proud young herder of cows.
His resolve was duly conveyed to the man
The haughty father of the handsome girl.
The fight hadn't started but the bulls -
How restless and excited are the brutes!
Ruddy of eyes and foamy-mouthed

The bulls strike terror as they scamper
And raise the dust with their cloven hooves.
All are tensed up. Amidst the din
The leading cowherd from his lofty perch
Makes a sign and the roar dies down,
Everyone keen and expectant
Eager to catch every word
Of his all - important proclamation.
The gathering listens, as if bound by a spell;
The boys and the girls drink in his words
As if on them their lives depend.

3

"Behold this bull of silvern hue! Only the cowherd youth
That fights this brute in the contest-ring and controls it through valour
Shall wed this comely cowherd lass with the sharpest sets of teeth!
Behold, again, this dusky bull equipped with killer horns!
Only the youth that dares to battle and make it obey him
Shall enjoy the bliss of sleeping on the tended tresses of this lass!
Now look at this bull with eyes of the hue of gold with a trace of black,
Of the nastiest nature and disposition!
The youth that controls it
Shall wed this noble, comely girl with the eyes of a gentle doe!
The daring youth with valour and courage that takes on this killer bull

Red in colour shall wed this girl with earrings nicely crafted
And shoulders plump and well-nourished like the stem of a full-grown bamboo!"

4

The senior cowherd identified
The killer bulls in the arena
That must be fought and subjugated
To win the hand of specified maidens,
In these words that sent the hearts
Of the boys and the girls madly racing.
The youth then entered the dusty ring
And the cowherds goaded the fiery bulls.
The young men picked out their chosen brutes
Victor or victim of the battle to be -
And the fray began! Besides the roar
Of the battling bulls and the noise of the crowd
The pastureland orchestra began to play
And all was din, a thunderous din
To the highest heavens, beyond endurance!

5

The battle was joined
The mad bulls rushing
At the expectant youth
Who threw their all
At the adversary.
A raging bull
Maddened by

The torment suffered
At the hands of a youth
Charged madly
At his tormentor
And gored him deep
With its javelin horns
And decked round the neck
With his entrails ran
In gory triumph
Round the ring
Amid the gasps
Of the spectators.
The powdery dust,
Pall-like, covered
The battling pairs
Of bull and man
While horns and hands
Severed, fell
And bubbling blood
With the dust combined
Made viscous mire.
And man and bull
Slipped in the mire
And fell to the ground
Still locked in combat

6

The girls sat watching, nerves on edge,
Their gutsy spirits zooming up
Or Crashing down to the earth below
As their men stood up bravely
Against the charging bull or fell
Overcome by a vengeful brute.
"Look at that boy, the intrepid son
Of the neighbouring cowherd" exclaimed a girl,
"See how he seizes a tenacious hold
Of the horns of the raging killer bull
On which he is seated, a precarious perch!
And the monster now with its ebbing strength
Tries all it can to shake him off
And tread on him and gore him to death
But he is made of sterner stuff
He will not leave the contest-ring
Without destroying its pride of strength.
He looks to me in this avenging mood
Like Siva who made the god of death
Cringe before him in craven fear!"
"Look at that bull!" cried another girl
Pointing a trembling finger,
Trembling with the tenseness of the fray,
"When the doughty youth at whom it charged
Fell down, slipping on the blood-soaked ground
I thought, surely, it was the end of him.

But, thunder and lightning! For the savage bull
Disdaining to trod on the fallen foe
Walks quickly away, leaving the youth
Unharmed, alive; does not the bull
Display the restraint of the proper soldier
In adherence to the hero's code
Which lays down that a fighter in the field
Disdains to slay the foe that's urarmed
That's not able to defend himself -
One who thinks it moral cowardice
To harm, to kill a fallen man!"
The cowherd lasses are haughty snobs.
Only the hand that catches hold
Of a pair of horns red with the blood
Of combatatnts can hold his girl
To his hero's chest in a tight embrace
Not for her is the cowardly youth
Who, when a bull that's mad with rage
Charges at him at cyclone speed
Does not stand his ground but flees
In craven panic with only the thought
Of saving his own worthless life,
The thoughtless fool who fails to see
That one should live a hero's life
And should die a hero's death,
Who dreads to meet the challenge thrown
And quell the bull and wed the girl
Of glossy tresses and moist eyes

Or die a hero, balladized
By the comeliest girls of the pastureland

7

In the contest-ring, the combats
Grew fiercer as the bulls
Got madder every moment
And the men, more reckless, braver
A bull had pierced the belly
Of a youthful combatant
And now was going the rounds
With the entrails of its victim
Coiled round its horns
Looking rathers like
Siva's head crescent
Bedecked by a wreath
Of crimson oleanders
A youth danced a while
On the back of a foaming bull,
Then sat on its humpy back
And kept pushing the brute
With no respite or ruth.
Seeing a savage bull
With spreading horns charge,
With calculated courage,
Choosing the right moment
Leapt a youth with ease
Passing through the space

Between the curving horns
And landed on the back
Of a greatly puzzled brute.
There was a bull of hue,
Deep-blue like a gem
Which was tormented
So badly by a youth,
The owners of the brute
Stood up in mute protest
While the rest of the assemblage
Roared their approbation.
A youth of dusky skin
So firmly hugged a bull
- An animal white in colour -
It began to look
Like the moon with the dusky spot!
When a youth caught hold
Of a ruddy-coloured bull
Just below its protruding ears
And turned it over by force,
The sweet-heart of this victor
Who wore a wreath round the head
Of the gem-blue kaya bloom,
In ecstasy she cried,
"My heart does palpitate
My dear, at the sight!
Does he not appear to you
As Krishna, the Lord of pastures

At the moment of victory
Over the demon despatched
By his foes, who took
The form of a hairy horse?"
During the furious struggle
Between man and beast in the ring
It just happened that
The wreath worn by the youth
Was thrown up in the air
To land up precision
On the neck of his own sweetheart!

8

"The one that rules my heart has triumphed
And I shall wed him, dear!
I hope and trust the village gossips
Shall cease to discuss us!"
Said one of the cowherd girls to another
"Now what will my kinsmen say?
The youth I love has subjugated
The nominated bull
And I am his. They cannot now
Refuse my wish, my dearest!"
Said another. A girl ecstatic
Exclaimed, "So will mine!
But who are these kinsmen to betroth me
To the cowherd lad today?
The moment he sprang without a thought

Betwixt the horns of the bull,
The fate-filled moment he leapt upon
The back of the vengeful brute
Was the exact time when our merger
Got decreed by fate!"

9

The sun was going down the mount on the western sea.
The day had mellowed out to a cool and pleasant evening.
The torrid fights were over. A peace now settled on
The contest ring and the bulls - the ones that still were up
Had been led away. The crowds had quickly melted
But the young men that had fought and quelled the fierce bulls
And the girls who, through the day had tasted ecstasy
And despair alternating sought the environs
Most suited for their mood - the woods adjoining
Where every kind of flower was in the fullest bloom.
Some sought the village common where the floor was strewn with flowers.
The thirsted trophies won, the loving hearts united
The beaux in gay disdain lead their blushing girls
To dance the pasture dance to the tune of the soulful songs
Balladizing all the deeds of valour done.
The heroes of the day now step in tune with these,
Hands on the shoulders plump of the girls that rule their hearts.
The blossom-scented woods and the flower - filled common.
Are rich with rosy fancies light as thistle - down

Now all is song and dance and lovers holding hands,

Tender love and laughter dispel the afternoon's

Savage vengeful rage, severed limbs and blood

The cry of anguished pain, the hush of sudden death

(This piece is an attempt at transcomposition of the first seven verses in the muḷlai section of the Kalitokai. Ideas of a similar nature have been collected and woven together to form the poem in nine sections. No point of importance has been ignored, only repetitive statements have been edited out. The present writer hopes that the edited and redesigned transcomposition will capture to the modern reader some of the strident love of life, the joy of adventure, of risking all and winning through, of tender love and fierce battling that these pieces present in archaic Tamil).

Book 6

Of Straying Men and Anguished Wives

When the lovers marry and settle down in a well-watered town in the plains, the leisure at his disposal turns the man's mind to vice. He strays from the narrow path of virtue but the woman at home proves constant; Sangam heroines are portrayed as the shining models of chastity. As they still continue to love their faithless husbands, they are sorrow-stricken and waste away at home.

The husband returns either because he is truly repentant or tires of a particular call girl or more often because he hears a son has been born to him. He hurries home but does not enter it precipitately; the society expects him to ask for his wife's permission to enter. The wife most often grants the permission with an occasional piece of sarcasm to let him know how badly she has suffered. Sometimes she refuses permission as she is too angry to forgive. The friend plays an active part in the parlays, often contributing an element of censoriousness as she is even more affected by the man's callousness than the wife.

Some of the best poems of this division are presented in the version of the call girl herself. Her arrogance at her own captivating charm, her total hold over the hero, her snithering contempt for the suffering wife, her easy amorality all come out with the proper clout in these pieces, a sampling of which has been included in the selection. But, despite her arrant self-confidence, Tamil Sangam literary tradition firmly reunites man and wife at the end and the straying is relegated as a bad dream to be dismissed from the mind.

Tiffs provide a welcome edge
To the bliss of lovers coming together
But the blissful sequel of having tiffs
Consists in their tight embrace
That puts an end to the tiff ongoing.

(Tirukkural)

May she, well-decked persevere with
The tiff that has started and may I keep

Supplicating for forgiveance
And may the night get extended
To give full scope for the tiff and the prayer!

(T.K.1329)

The gentle upset caused by a tiff
May lead to the decline, for the moment,
Of the lover's favour but the latter gains
In weight and substance, on that account!

(T.T.1323)

The friend to herself

How amazing is her love!
She's brought pelf to her husband's house
By the mere act of stepping in
As his bride. But what a betrayal!
He strayed from the path, proved unfaithful!
But when he returned, seeking entry,
She welcomed him with her sweetest smile
On her glowing face, with words to match
With not a trace of all that agony
The heart-ache of those lonely days!
But what a change in the foot-loose husband!
Circumscribed by a sense of shame
He moves about in his ancestral house
Embarrassment writ large on his features!

(Kuruntokai 10)

The girl, addressing a crab

Who shall bear my message of love
The message damp with tears, but you!
Not the green glades, not the punnai trees
Whose new-blown blooms are heavy with bees
Nor shall the salt-creek report my love
To the sea-shore chieftain; in his favoured land
The restless bees athirst to feed
On the golden dust of flowers seek
Till they find the dusky neidal
And sitting on the full-blown petals
They gorge themselves on the golden pollen
Sweet as nectar: and inebriate,
They lie drowsy, their restless nature
Stilled for the moment: such is the land
He rules over! He seems to share
The helpless plight of these drunken bees!
For he too, drunk with a heady passion
For the painted women of easy virtue
Lies entangled in their glamorous coils.
None but you, O king of crabs
Can go to him and tell the tale
Of what I suffer on his account
For, in the darkest hour of gloomy nights
When the seagulls sleep with their constant mates
Perched on the branches hanging low
Of the thazhai trees that line the creek

And sleeping, dream of dining on
The white fish sweet and succulent
Far from their favourite hunting grounds
Where killer sharks abound - of nights
He came to the tryst and found in me
An arbour for his fevered heart
An anchorage for his restless soul
O friendly crab, go, remind him
And seek from his that emollient
Which once I gave him, now for me;
Go, do not tarry, king of crabs,
Seek from the chief of the sea-shore village
The healing herb for my sundered heart!

(Akananooru 170)

The girl to her friend

It's the height of monsoon. The river overflowing
With water, sprinkled dense with flowers blooming
Reared rich in verdant clusters by the fecund rains
Lies round the city, the Vaigai praised by poets,
Like a garland worn; the water flowing over
Dashes 'gainst the city ramparts like a foe
Where human foes can never dream of fighting
He is a native of Madurai city. Before his coming back
I planned to nurse my deepest dudgeon, dear;
I made up my midn to trun the faithless man
Away, in anger when he came back from the haunts

With a loveless heart, the haunts of public women
Showing the scars where they had struck him with
The flower wreaths on their hair, the comely women
Of stirking beauty with unguent-painted eyes
But no! Forsaking all the dudgeon, dear,
My feckless heart does open out to him,
And, unresistant, I merge in him in love!
I did decide to turn my face against
The faithless person when he tried to come
Back to me with the sandal unguent
On his chest all scraped away through lying
On the heaving breasts of flower-like prostitutes
With hips like creepers and all the comely graces
Of sexy women. I was quite decided;
But when my husband came to me, my dear
This heart of mine that lacks a firm resolve
Unprincipled, on seeing him goes out
To welcome, to urge me on to merge,
I was firm, before he tried to come
Back to me, that I would continue
Being doleful, never looking at
The face of the faithless person. But, my dear,
When he did come with ruddy marks of bites
With the well-set teeth of comely prostitutes,
On his person, this heart of mine tnat lacks
Gritty resolution urges me to merge
Wholly in the faithless man; how resist

The promptings of my loving heart, my dear?
Comely friend with forehead, crescent-like,
This heart that keeps me company
Does not act in proper friendliness,
It betrays me in all the ways in can!
With such an one, how can I at this rate
Fulfil myself, how bring my plans to fruit?

(Kalitokai - Marutam 2)

To friend of the girl (now a married woman) to a messenger from the straying husband

Boys at play cannot use as transport
The wooden toy-horse fashioned by
The carpenter, but they pull it about
And feel delighted playing with the toy:
In like manner I derive pleasure
Recollecting the days we had
Together, as man and wife
I do not have to be with him
Constantly, all the time
And my bangles stay put still
Upon my wrists; I'm happy, fulfilled!

(Kuruntokai 61)

The girl to her friend in the hearing of the messenger sent as a pacifying measure by the straying husband

May you live long,
My dear! My skin

Has lost its natural
Complexion
And has now started
Looking like the stem
Of the ambal whose bark
Has been peeled off
- The ambal that grows
In the pond in our town

(Her skin should normally have regained its comely natural colour on hearing the messenger if she could really believe her husband was in earnest. Since she pointedly refers to the pallor of the skin, this indicates her rejection of her husband's request)

(Ainkurunooru 35)

The wife to the husband who had strayed and wishes to return

Chief of plains where a buffalo
That feeds on the kaluneer and lotus blooms
Growing apace in the fields of rice
Tiring, walks up as a triumphant warrior
Returning from the field of battle,
To the heaped-up sands and goes to sleep!
You embrace me with a feigned ardour
On my tresses glossy, handsome
Like Iruppai city, fertile, well-watered
Ruled by Viraan who crushes his foes
With his triumphant javelin, the garland of blooms
Which I wear to beautify them
Is now fading and you are the foeman

That makes it fade! It is not easy
For me, O chieftain, to forget that!

(Narrinai 260)

The girl to her friend

In the chief's fertile, well-watered domain
A mango fruit falls noisely
Into the pool below where ambal buds
Stick out like cranes with their wings folded
You counsel me, dear, against displaying
My resentment at my faithless husband
Whose lust for women remains unsatisfied
I too am not disposed to show
The resentment that's surging in my bosom against him
My hands are full with a stream of guests
Coming to my house which now resembles
Kunroor ruled by chiefs of yore
Where farmers break the shells of snails
Roasted, on the back of the field tortoise
I am busy, I have no time to nurse
My dudgeon against the straying chieftain!

(Narrinai 280)

The girl to the friend describing the misconduct of her husband in the metaphor of the plains

In his well-watered and fertile land,
The buffalo with ruddy eyes and horns,

A dusky hue, goes out to the fields
Felling the soft stems of sugarcane
Ploughing through rows of ambal blossom
And gobbling the blooms of the blue-bell plant
Settles down to cud-chew what it has eaten,
Lowering its jaw to suit the action

(Tinaimalai Nurraimbadu 137)

The girl to the husband who has strayed

Leading citizen of the riverine town
Where the otter resident in the stream
Giving off the odour of stinking flesh
Secures its breakfast of valai fish!
Even in the event of my feminine graces,
My colour and my beauty deserting me
I shall not let your manly chest
Contaminated by alien breasts
Hold me fast in a tight embrace!

(Ainkurunooru 63)

The friend to the minstrel sent by the straying young man

How full of love
Your chief can be,
O minstrel-friend,
From your paean of praise
In his city,
A humble sparrow
Flying out

To gather things
Soft, downy,
To cushion the nest
To accommodate
The eggs its mate
Now pregnant will lay
Describes a field
Of sugar-cane
And speeds to it
In eager haste
But do you think
It is out to plunder
The juice of the cane
Sweet beyond words?
No, singer-friend,
They tiny bird
Crops in a hurry
The bloom of the cane
Tasteless, scentless,
Carries it off
In great triumph
To cushion the nest
We know, singer,
How filled with love
Your chieftain is,

From the picture you draw -
Our only source

(Kuruntokai 85)

The friend of the girl to the boy through the bard-messenger he had despatched

The fish which had managed to wriggle out
Of the beak of a crane then goes in terror
Of a well-formed bud of a lotus creeper,
Mistaking it to be the killer crane,
In the waterfilled lands of your prosperous town!
The bard you have sent has proved a liar!
Now all the women you have left to grieve
Will be apt to label all the bards
That are there in the world as rank liars!

(Kuruntokai 127)

(The reference to "all the women" is an indication of the extent of the boy's promiscuity)

The friend of the girl to the young man returning from the homes of prostitutes and trying to secure admission by making oaths

Please return to us
Our feminine graces
And take away
Your many oaths -

Our graces, chief
Of riverine plains,
That resemble
The city of Thondi
Where handsome girls
With comely bangles
Play mirthful games
By placing the pestle
Used to pound
Rice into flakes,
On the bund
In the paddy fields!

(Kuruntokai 238)

The friend of the girl to the young man just returning from a prostitute

Chief of lands
On the bank of a river,
You have enjoyed
The feminine graces
Of women whose shoulders
Resemble the end
Of the pestle of metal
Used in the husking
Of blackgram berries,
Shoulders where
The picture of sugarcane
Is painted in unguent,

Women with long
Tresses and jewels;
You have enjoyed them
And cast them aside.
How very reliable
Are your oaths,
Made to them
And made before us
O chief of lands
On the bank of a river!

(Kuruntokai 384)

The friend of the girl to the husband who has strayed :

The farmers who went out to the fields to sow
With basket of seeds - the well-watered fields
From which the stalks have been removed,
The stalks of paddy, the previous crop -
Return home with fish in the baskets in the gloaming.
Chieftain, your town is fruitful, prosperous!
Wise men declare it is not true wealth
That makes you talk in boastful language
And ride about in speed in chariots.
These are not the signs of wealth
They are the sequel of deeds in the past.
Wealth, on the other hand, is that culture of the heart
Distinguished by a compassion

That makes one anguished, feel bad about
The distress of the people around.

(Narrinai 210)

(Clearly the husband who has got caught by the snares of public women is a little conceited about his wealth. The friend of the girl lures him on by talking first about his prosperity and then gives him a lashing by proposing a refreshingly humanistic definition of true wealth, outside the scope of Adam Smith)

The girl to the emissaries despatched by the erring husband

The Chief of plains where the female fish
Gobble the blue bells blooming in ponds
Is not the same as in those happy days.
He has enjoyed my feminine graces
And now has left me like the fibrous mass,
The bagasse of sugarcane after all the juice
Has been extracted.

(Tinaimoli Aimbadu 39)

The friend of the girl to her with the messengers of the young man who was straying, listening

In the chieftain's domain
The dotted crab at birth
Becomes the cause of the death
Of its own mother
The mother crocodile
Devour its offspring
Surely the chieftain

Has derived such traits
From the land of his birth!
If he has not, dear,
Then how does he forsake
The public women
After embracing them
So tightly, their bangles
Of gold tinkle?

(Ainkurunooru 24)

The friend of the girl to the bard deputed by the erring husband

Bard, is it necessary
For one to recommend
The chief of prosperous plains
And talk commendingly
Of his enduring love for us.
In the case of the wise who know,
The way they move with those
Bound by bonds of friendship
Will reveal their inner hearts
Without the need of words.

(Aintinai Aimbadu 23)

The friend of the girl to her in front of the bard sent as a messenger by the husband who had strayed

If you, my dear, with sharp white teeth
Desire lasting friendship

With the chief of the plains, listen to me!
In his domain, the ambal
Blossoming white in the paddy fields
Gets tied up with the paddy
The cow that has just than calved notices
And eats a few of the flowers
The rest being devoured by the aged buffalo
Retired from active labours.
You are of the noblest mien, my dear!
While people call the chieftain
A bee that goes at dead of night
To the pool to drink the honey
Off the flowers that have newly blossomed
They term him a bee, not a man!

(Narrinai 290)

(The purpose of the friend in making such a stark comparison is to suggest to her the acceptance of her husband as he is, with all his lecherous ways)

The friend of the girl to her playmates, on seeing a young female artiste coming as a messenger from the straying young man

Dear girls, notice this artiste coming
And standing in the field of festivities -
A girl with timid eyes and tresses
Anointed with a special unguent,
Supple shoulders and silvern teeth
And decked with flowers and leaves, alone!

Get up, dear girls, let us hurry
To protect our chief from her dangerous wiles!
Like the Aryans ranged in the Mulloor battle
Who ran in panic on seeing the javelin
Wielded by Malayan, we shall prove
Inane, powerless before her depredations!
Get up, let us rally to the chief's support!

(Narrinai 170)

The prostitute in the hearing of the friend of the girl, on learning that the girl had talked ill of her

People in the know all inform me
That the wife of the chieftain dislikes both
Her husband and me - the chief in whose lands
In the fields where bloom the fire-like lotus,
Small fry leap like puffed rice
To devour which an aged bird
Slowly comes and settles on a leaf
Scented and green; I cannot hate
The chieftain or her; but I cannot live
Without taking it out on that silly woman.
Let us now go and walk around
So that she sees us in full display
Shaking our bangles and walking with
Haughty steps, the purpose being
To make her beat her stomach like
The blackspot of the drum that's beaten
By the bard who lives on royal bounty

Getting presents of pachyderms
Every time the Pandya King
Leads fighters with upraised swords
To a splendid victory in the field of battle
(Which he does all the time
Through his mastery of the martial arts)
So come with me, let's enjoy the fun!

(Akananooru 106)

The friend of the girl to the friend of the young man

Drink in this scene, it's worth imbibing!
In the early moonlight, in the gloaming
The chief came in, saw his son
Prone in the bed and himself lying
Next to him and sighting like a tusker
That's resting, embraced him with a burgeoning passion;
And his wife, coming up, embraced his back!
What a scene to be blessed to watch!
What forgivance, O friend of the chief!

(Kuruntokai 359)

(The husband who had strayed was refused admittance by his wife; but he walked in straight and embraced his little child with great love. The wife, leaving off her dudgeon embraces his back)